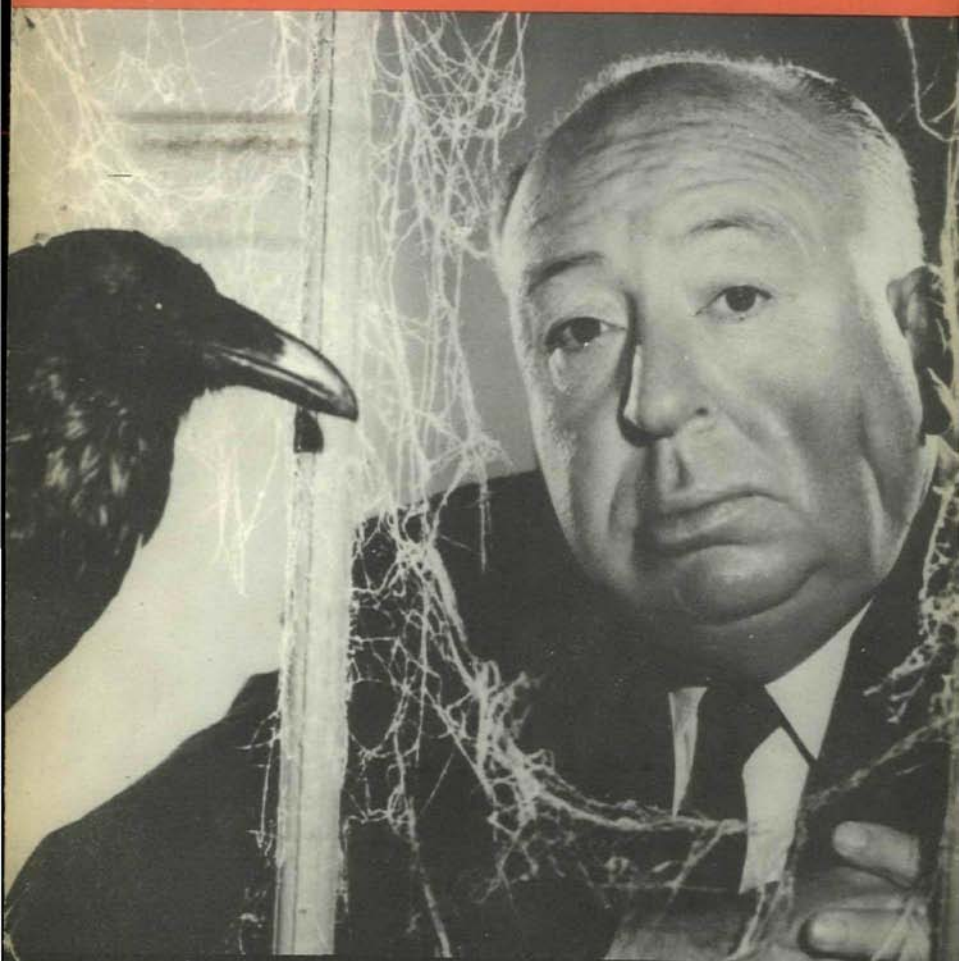


ALFRED

NOVEMBER 50¢ K

HITCHCOCK'S

MYSTERY MAGAZINE



NEW stories presented by the master of SUSPENSE

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November 1969

Dear Reader:

Every year at this time I grow fearful of adding a burden to the agencies that have to do with easing unemployment. It is not my intention, I assure you, to put witches, ghosts and goblins out of work, but with competition of the sort presented herein, they may find themselves passé—at least as a group, cavorting en masse, at mere annual intervals.

Certainly grotesque and spectral individuals may well warrant recognition and study the year around, and there is where I may help, as you will discover among the new stories of mystery and suspense that follow.

All inhabitants of these pages, whether good or evil, earthly or ethereal, need only borrow your senses to spring to life. Oblige them, if you will, and read on.

Alfred Hitchcock

Richard E. Decker, Publisher
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Ernest M. Hutter, Editor

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Marguerite Blair Deacon

Associate Editor
Circulation Director
Art Director

ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S

mystery magazine

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With a little more nicety, most difficulties would be resolved.



WE got the case instead of the Robbery Squad, because when somebody gets hurt or killed during a holdup, it's Homicide's baby. The place was a small jewelry store

**NICE
GUY**



in the eight hundred block of Franklin Avenue. All the shops in that area are small, mostly one- or two-man businesses. The jewelry store was bracketed by a pawnshop on one side of it and a one-man barbershop on the other.

Gilt-lettering on the plate-glass window read: *Bruer and Benjamin, Jewelers*. A squad car was parked in front and a muscular young cop in uniform stood on the sidewalk before the shop door. A

few bystanders were clustered before the pawnshop and barbershop, but the area in front of the jewelry store had been cleared.

I didn't recognize the cop, but he knew me. He touched his cap, said, "Hi, Sergeant," and moved aside to let me pass.

Inside, the store was long and narrow, with display cases on either side and with only about a six-foot-wide aisle between them. There was another short display case at

the rear of the room, with an open door beyond it.

Another uniformed cop, this one of about my vintage, was inside the store. I knew him. He was a twenty-year veteran named Phil Ritter, and also a sergeant.

I said, "Morning, Phil."

He said, "How are you, Sod?" then jerked his thumb toward the rear display case. "Victim's lying back there."

I nodded, then looked at the other occupant of the place, a mousy little man of about sixty who stood nearby with an expression of numbed shock on his face.

"Witness," Ritter said briefly.

I nodded again and continued on back to the rear of the place. There was a space on either side of

blood running from beneath the arm indicated that he had a hole in it. There wasn't much blood, suggesting he had died almost instantly.

I came back around the counter and asked Sergeant Ritter, "Doctor look at him?"

"Just enough to verify he was dead. A Dr. Vaughan in the next block. Mr. Bruer here called him." He nodded toward the little man. "He had to go back to his office, but he said you could contact him there if you want. He also said to tell you he didn't move the body."

"Good."

I looked at the little man. He was only about five feet six and weighed possibly a hundred and twenty-five pounds. He had thin-

by Richard Deming

the rear counter. I walked behind it to look down at the still figure on the floor. The man lay on his left side with his knees drawn up in a fetal position. He was lean and thin-faced, with long sideburns and a hairline mustache which made him resemble the villain of some mid-Victorian melodrama. I guessed he had been in his late forties.

His right arm blocked the view of his chest, but a thin trickle of

ning gray hair, wore steel-rimmed glasses and the expression of a frightened rabbit.

I've been accused of intimidating witnesses with my sour manner. This one looked so easily intimidated that I deliberately made my voice as pleasant as possible when I said, "I'm Sergeant Sod Harris of the Homicide Squad. Your name is Bruer?"

"Yes, sir," he said in a shaky voice. "Fred Bruer. I'm one of the



partners in the jewelry store.”
“He was the other one?” I asked,
nodding toward the rear.

“Yes, sir. Andrew Benjamin.
This is awful. We’ve been business
partners for ten years.”

“Uh-huh,” I said. “I know this
has been a shock to you, Mr. Bruer,
but we’ll do the best we can to get
the person who killed your part-
ner. You were here when it hap-
pened?”

“Yes, sir. It was me he held up.
I was out front here and Andy
was back in the workshop. I had
just made up our weekly bank de-
posit—I always go to the bank on
Friday morning—and was just
drawing the strings of the leather
bag I carry the deposit in, when
his fellow came in and pulled a
gun on me. I guess he must have
been watching us for some time
and knew our routine. Casing, they
call it, don’t they?”

“Uh-huh,” I said. “What makes
you think he had cased you?”

“He seemed to know what was
in the bag, because he said, ‘I’ll take
that, mister.’ I gave it to him with-
out argument. Then he came be-
hind the counter where I was,
emptied the register there into the
bag, then went behind the other
counter and did the same with
that register.”

I glanced both ways and saw
identical cash registers centered

against the walls behind each
counter. “Which counter were you
behind?” I asked.

He pointed to the one to the
right as you faced the door. “I can
tell you exactly how much he got,
Sergeant.”

“Oh?” I said. “How?”

“I have a duplicate deposit slip
for the cash and checks that were
in the bag, and there was exactly
fifty dollars in each register in ad-
dition to that. That’s the change
we start off with in each register,
and we hadn’t yet had a customer.
We’d only been open for business
about thirty seconds when the
bandit walked in. I always make
up the deposit before we unlock
the door Friday mornings.”

“I see. Well, you can hold the
figure for the moment. First, get
on with what happened. How’d he
happen to shoot your partner?”

“I think he just got rattled. He
was backing toward the door with
the deposit bag in his hand when
Andy suddenly appeared from the
back room. Andy didn’t even know
a holdup was in progress. I imagine
he came out to take over the front
because he knew I would be leav-
ing for the bank at any minute. But
he opened the workshop door and
stepped out so abruptly, he startled
the bandit. The man shot him and
fled.”

Typical, I thought sourly. It’s

that kind of skittishness that makes cops regard armed robbers as the most dangerous of all criminals. They're all potential murderers.

I asked, "What did this jerk look like?"

"He was about forty years old and kind of long and lanky. I would guess about six feet tall and a hundred and seventy-five pounds. He had a thin white scar running from the left corner of his mouth clear to the lobe of his left ear, and he had a large, hairy mole here." He touched the center of his right cheek. "His complexion was dark, like a gypsy's, he had straight, black, rather greasy hair and a rather large hooked nose. I would know him again anywhere."

"I guess you would," I said, surprised by the detail of the description. Witnesses are seldom so observant. "How was he dressed?"

"In tan slacks, a tan leather jacket and a tan felt hat with the brim turned down in front and up in back. And oh, yes, on the back of the hand he held the gun in—" He paused to consider, then said with an air of surprised recollection, "His left hand, now that I think of it—there was the tattoo of a blue snake coiled around a red heart."

"You *are* observant," I said, then gave Phil Ritter an inquiring glance.

"We put the description on the

air soon as we got here," Ritter said. "Mr. Bruer didn't mention the tattoo or that the bandit was left-handed before, though."

"Better go radio in a supplementary report," I suggested. "Maybe this one will be easier than the run-of-the-mill. The guy certainly ought to be easy to identify."

I was beginning to feel a lot more enthusiastic about this case than I had when the lieutenant sent me out on it. Generally you find almost nothing to work on, but here we had Fred Bruer's excellent description of the bandit.

According to figures compiled by the FBI, eighty percent of the homicides in the United States are committed by relatives, friends or acquaintances of the victims, which gives you something to work on, but in a typical stickup kill, some trigger-happy punk puts a bullet in a store clerk or customer he never saw before in his life. Most times your only clue is a physical description, usually vague and, if there is more than one witness, maybe contradictory. Too, you can almost bank on it that the killer was smart enough to drop the gun off some bridge into deep water.

While Phil Ritter was outside radioing in the additions to the bandit's description, I asked Bruer if he had noticed what kind of gun the robber used. He said it was a blue

eel revolver, but he couldn't judge that caliber because he wasn't very familiar with guns.

I asked him if the bandit had touched anything which might have left fingerprints.

"The two cash registers," Bruer said. "He punched the no-sale buttons on each."

Ritter came back in, trailed by Art Ward of the crime lab, who was carrying his field kit and a camera.

"Morning, Sod," Ward greeted me. "What sort of gruesome chore do you have for me this time?"

"Behind the rear counter," I said, jerking a thumb that way. "Then dust the two cash registers for prints, with particular attention to the no-sale buttons."

"Sure," Art said.

He set down his field lab kit and carried his camera to the rear of the store. While he was taking pictures of the corpse from various angles,

I checked the back room. It was a small workshop for watch and jewelry repairing. Beyond it was a bolted and locked rear door with a key in the inside lock. I unbolted it, unlocked it, pushed open the door and peered out into an alley lined with trash cans behind the various small businesses facing Franklin Avenue.

I wasn't really looking for anything in particular. Over the years

I had just gotten in the habit of being thoroughly nosy. I closed the door again and relocked and rebolted it.

Back in the main room I asked Sergeant Ritter if he had turned up any other witnesses from among nearby merchants or clerks before I got there.

"The barber just west of here and the pawnbroker on the other side both think they heard the shot," Ritter said. "As usual, they thought it was just a backfire, and didn't even look outdoors. Nobody came to investigate until our squad car got here, but that brought out a curious crowd. Nobody we talked to but the two I mentioned heard or saw anything, but we didn't go door-to-door. We just talked to people who gathered around."

I said, "While I'm checking out this barber and pawnbroker, how about you hitting all the places on both sides of the street in this block to see if anyone spotted the bandit either arriving or leaving here?"

Ritter shrugged. "Sure, Sod."

I called to Art Ward that I would be back shortly and walked out with Sergeant Ritter. Ritter paused to talk to his young partner for a moment, and I went to the pawnshop next door.

The proprietor, who was alone, was a benign looking man of about seventy named Max Jacobs. He

couldn't add anything to what he had already told Phil Ritter except that he placed the time he had heard what he took to be a truck backfire at exactly a minute after nine. He explained that his twenty-year-old nephew, who worked for him, hadn't showed up for work, and the old man kept checking the clock to see how late he was. It was now nearly ten, and the boy still had neither appeared nor phoned in, and his home phone didn't answer.

"What's your nephew's name?" I asked.

"Herman. Herman Jacobs. He's my brother's boy."

"Mr. Bruer next door know him?"

Jacobs looked puzzled. "Of course. Herman's worked for me ever since he got out of high school."

That was a silly tack to take anyway, I realized. The jeweler had described the bandit as around forty, and Jacobs' nephew was only half that age.

"Following the shot, you didn't see or hear anything at all?" I asked. "Like somebody running past your front window, for instance?"

The elderly pawnbroker shook his head. "I wasn't looking that way. When I wasn't watching the clock, I was trying to phone Her-

man, that good-for-nothing bum.

There didn't seem to be any more I could get out of him. He thanked him and headed for the door.

"How's poor Fred taking it?" he asked to my back.

Pausing, I turned around. "Mr. Bruer, you mean? He's still a bit shaken up."

Jacobs sighed. "Such a nice man. Always doing good for people. Ask anybody in the neighborhood, nobody will tell you a thing against Fred Bruer. A man with a real heart."

"That so?" I said.

"Only thing is, he's such an easy touch. Gives credit to anybody. Now, Mr. Benjamin was another proposition entirely. I don't like to speak ill of the dead, but there was a cold fish."

It intrigued me that he was on a first-name basis with the surviving jewelry-store proprietor, but referred to the deceased younger partner as *Mr. Benjamin*. Perhaps he hadn't known the younger man as long. I decided to ask. "Have you known Mr. Bruer longer than Mr. Benjamin?"

He looked surprised. "No, of course not. They opened for business together next door about ten years back. I met them both the same day."

"But you were on friendlier

terms with Mr. Bruer, was that it?"

"Now how did you know that?" he inquired with rather flattering admiration for my deductive ability. "Yes, as a matter of fact. But everybody's a friend of Fred. Nobody liked Mr. Benjamin very much."

"What was the matter with him?" I asked.

"He was a vindictive man. When he had a little spat with somebody, he was never satisfied just to forget it afterward. He had to have his revenge—like his trouble with Amelio Lapaglia, the barber on the other side of the jewelry shop. Last time haircut prices went up, Mr. Benjamin refused to pay, they had an argument and Amelio threatened to have him arrested. Mr. Benjamin finally paid, but he wasn't content just to stop going there for haircuts after that. He did things like phoning the police that Amelio was overparked, and the health department to complain that he had no lid on his garbage can out back. Actually I think Mr. Benjamin stole the lid, but Amelio got fined for violating the health laws."

I made a face. "One of those. I've had that kind of neighbor."

"I don't think even Fred really liked him, although he was always making excuses for him. I doubt their partnership would have lasted so long if they hadn't been brothers-

in-law," he added matter-of-factly.

I gave him a surprised look. "They were brothers-in-law?"

"Sure. Mr. Benjamin is—was married to Fred's baby sister. She's not a baby now, of course. She's about forty, but she's twenty-one years younger than Fred. She was just an infant when their parents died, and he raised her. She's more like a daughter to him than a sister. He never married himself, so Paula and her two kids are all the family he has. He's absolutely crazy about the baby."

"The baby?"

"Paula had another baby just a couple of years ago. She also has a boy around twenty in the army."

The phone at the rear of the pawnshop rang. As Mr. Jacobs went to answer it, I wondered if anyone had bothered to phone the widow that she was a widow.

The pawnbroker lifted the phone and said, "Jacobs' Small Loans." After a pause his voice raised in pitch and he said, "Where are you, and what's your excuse this time?" There was another pause, then, "That's supposed to be an excuse? You get here fast as you can! You hear?"

He slammed down the phone and came back to where I stood near the door. "My nephew," he said in an indignant tone. "He stayed overnight with a friend and

overslept, he says. More likely he was in an all-night poker game and just got home. Good for nothing, he'll be, all day."

I made a sympathetic noise, thanked him again and left.

The young cop was still guarding the entrance to the jewelry store when I went by, but the crowd of curious onlookers had thinned considerably. It wouldn't disperse completely until the body was carried away, though, I knew. There are always a few morbid people in every crowd who will hang around forever on the chance of seeing a corpse.

Down near the end of the block on this side of the street I spotted Phil Ritter coming from one shop and entering another. At his apparent rate of progress it looked as though it wouldn't take him long to finish both sides.

Amelio Lapaglia was cutting a man's hair all the time I talked to him. He had been cutting hair when he heard what he assumed was a backfire too, he said. He hadn't noticed the time, but it had to be just after nine, because he had just opened for business and had just started on his first customer.

His customer must have heard the shot too, he said in answer to my question, but neither of them had mentioned it.

"Aroun' here trucks go by all day

long," he said. "You hear *bang* like a gun maybe two, three times a day."

He hadn't noticed anyone pass his window immediately after the shot, he said, but then he had been concentrating on cutting hair.

I didn't bother to ask him about his feud with the dead man, because it had no bearing on the case. He certainly hadn't been the bandit.

When I got back to the jewelry store, Art Ward had finished both his picture taking and his dusting of the cash registers. He reported there were no fingerprints on either register good enough to lift, which didn't surprise me.

I told the lab technician he could go, then went back to give the corpse a more detailed examination than I had before. Aside from discovering that the bullet hole was squarely in the center of his chest, I didn't learn anything new from my examination.

Then I asked Bruer for the duplicate of his bank deposit slip. After adding the hundred dollars which had been in the registers to the amount shown on the slip, the sum stolen came to seven hundred and forty dollars in cash and two hundred and thirty-three in checks. The jeweler said this represented a full week's gross receipts.

From Fred Bruer I got the phone number of the doctor who had ex-

amined the body and phoned to ask him to mail a report to Dr. Swartz, the coroner's physician. After that I had nothing to do but wait for someone to come for the body and for Phil Ritter to finish.

While waiting I asked Bruer if he had phoned his sister.

He looked startled. "I—I never even thought of it."

"Probably just as well," I said. "The phone isn't a very satisfactory way to break news like this. She should be told personally. I'll handle it for you, if you want. I have to see her anyway."

"You do?" he asked in surprise.

"It's routine in homicide cases to contact the next of kin, even when it's open-and-shut like this one. What's her address?"

He hesitated for a moment before saying, "She lives down on the south side, but she's staying with me in my apartment on North Twentieth at the moment. This is going to hit her awful hard, Sergeant, because she and Andy were having a little squabble. It's terrible to have somebody close to you die when things aren't quite right. You have trouble forgiving yourself for having a fight at that particular time."

"Uh-huh," I said. "I understand." I asked for his address and wrote it in my notebook.

A couple of morgue attendants

came for the body before Phil Ritter completed his survey, but he returned only minutes later.

"Nothing," he reported. "Nobody saw the bandit come in here, leave here, or walking or running along the street. If anyone aside from the two next-door neighbors heard the shot, he paid no attention to it and can't remember it."

There was nothing more to be done at the scene of the crime. I dismissed Sergeant Ritter and his partner, and took off myself.

The apartment on North Twentieth was on the first floor of a neat, modern brick building. A slim, attractive brunette of about forty answered the door.

I took off my hat. "Mrs. Benjamin?"

"Yes."

I showed my badge. "Sergeant Sod Harris of the police, ma'am. May I come in?"

She looked startled. "Police? What—" Then she stepped aside and said, "Certainly. Please do."

I moved into a comfortably furnished front room and she closed the door behind me. A plump, pretty little girl about two years old sat in the center of the floor playing with a doll. A red-haired man in his mid-forties, with wide shoulders and a homely but cheerful face, sat on a sofa making himself at home. He had his shoes off, his

suitcoat was draped over the back of the sofa, his tie was loosened and his collar was open. A glass with some beer in it and a half-empty bottle of beer sat on the cocktail table before the sofa.

The man rose to his feet. The little girl gave me a sunny smile and said, "Hi, man."

I smiled back. "Hi, honey."

The woman said, "Robert Craig, Sergeant—"

"Harris," I said. "Sod Harris."

Robert Craig held out his hand. He had a firm grip.

"And this is my daughter, Cindy," Mrs. Benjamin said proudly, looking at the child almost with adoration.

I smiled at the little girl again and got a big return smile. I could understand how her uncle would be crazy about her. I was a little crazy about her myself, and I had just met her.

Mrs. Benjamin said, "What can I do for you, Sergeant?"

"I'm afraid I have some bad news, ma'am." I glanced at the child. "Maybe she'd better not hear it."

Paula Benjamin paled. The red-haired man said, "Let's go see if your other dolls are asleep yet, Cindy." He scooped up the little girl and carried her from the room.

Mrs. Benjamin said, "My—it isn't my brother, is it?"

"No," I replied. "Your husband."

Her color returned and I got the curious impression that she was relieved. "Oh. What happened?"

Her reaction was hardly what Fred Bruer had led me to expect. She sounded as though she didn't particularly care what had happened. I saw no point in trying to break it gently, so I let her have it in a lump.

I said, "The jewelry store was held up this morning. Your brother is unharmed, but the bandit shot your husband. He's dead."

She blinked, but she didn't turn pale again. She merely said, "Oh," then lapsed into silence.

Robert Craig came back into the room alone. The woman looked at him and said, "Andy's dead."

A startled expression crossed the redhead's face, then he actually smiled. "Well, well," he said. "That solves the Cindy problem."

Paula Benjamin stared at him. "How can you think of that now?"

"You expect me to burst into tears?" he asked. He looked at me. "Sorry if I seem callous, Sergeant, but Andy Benjamin was hardly a friend of mine. He had me named correspondent in a divorce suit. What did he die of?"

"A holdup man shot him," I said and glanced at the woman.

Her face had turned fire red. "Did you have to announce that?"

she said to Craig. "Sergeant Harris isn't interested in our personal affairs."

Craig shrugged. "You and your brother! Never let the neighbors see your dirty linen. Everybody was going to know after it broke in the papers anyway."

"It won't break in the papers now!" she snapped at him.

Then her attention was distracted by little Cindy toddling back into the room, carrying two dolls. Her mother swept her up into her arms.

"Oh, honey!" she said, kissing her. "You're going to get to stay with Mommie forever and ever!"

I thought it was a good time to excuse myself. I told both Craig and Mrs. Benjamin it was nice to have met them, traded a final smile with Cindy, and left.

By now it was noon. I stopped for lunch, then afterward, instead of checking in at headquarters, I went to the courthouse and looked up the divorce case of *Benjamin vs Benjamin*.

Andrew Benjamin's complaint was on file, but as yet an answer hadn't been filed by Paula Benjamin. The disagreement between the two was more than the "little squabble" Fred Bruer had mentioned, and Andrew Benjamin's reaction had been characteristically vindictive.

The dead man's affidavit was in

the usual legal jargon, but what it boiled down to was that he and a private detective had surprised his wife and Robert Craig together in a motel room and had gotten camera evidence. Divorce was asked on the ground of adultery, with no alimony to be paid the defendant, and with a request for sole custody of little Cindy to be granted the father. Benjamin's vindictiveness showed in his further request that the mother be barred from even having visitation rights on the ground that she was of unfit moral character to be trusted in her daughter's presence. As evidence, he alleged previous adulteries with a whole series of unnamed men and charged that Paula was an incurable nymphomaniac.

When I left the courthouse, I sat in my car and brooded for some time. Fred Bruer's remarkable powers of observation took on a different significance in the light of what I had just learned. Maybe his detailed description of the bandit hadn't been from observation after all, but merely from imagination.

I drove back to the ten hundred block of Franklin Avenue. The jewelry store was locked and there was a *Closed* sign on the front door.

I went into the pawnshop. A pale, fat boy of about twenty who looked as though he were suffering from a hangover was waiting on a cus-

tomers. The elderly Mr. Jacobs glanced out from the back room as I entered, then moved forward to meet me. I waited for him just inside the front door, so that we would be far enough from the other two to avoid being overheard.

I said, "Mr. Jacobs, do you happen to know if the partners next door ever kept a gun around the place?"

He first looked surprised by the question, then his expression became merely thoughtful. "Hmm," he said after ruminating. "Mr. Benjamin it was. Yes, it was a long time ago, but I'm sure it was Mr. Benjamin, not Fred. Right after they opened for business Mr. Benjamin bought a gun from me. To keep in the store in case of robbery, he said. Yes, it was Mr. Benjamin, I'm sure."

"Wouldn't you still have a record?" I asked.

"Of course," he said in a tone of mild exasperation at himself. "It won't even be very far back in the gun book. We don't sell more than a dozen guns a year."

He went behind the counter and took a ledger from beneath it. I moved over to the other side of the counter as he leafed through it. The fat young man, whom I took to be nephew Herman, was examining a diamond ring through a jeweler's loupe for the customer.

Max Jacobs kept running his index finger down a column of names on each page, flipping to the next page and repeating the process. Finally the finger came to a halt.

"Here it is," he said. "September 10, ten years ago. Andrew J. Benjamin, 1726 Eichelberger Street. A .38 caliber Colt revolver, serial number 231840."

I took out my notebook and copied this information down.

"Why did you want to know?" the old man asked curiously.

I gave my standard vague answer. "Just routine."

I thanked him and left before he could ask any more questions. The customer was counting bills as I walked out, and nephew Herman was sealing the ring in a small envelope.

Amateur murderers usually don't know enough to dispose of murder weapons, but just in case, when I got back to headquarters I arranged for a detail to go sift all the trash in the cans in the alley behind the jewelry store. They didn't find anything.

There was nothing more I could do until I got the report on what caliber bullet had killed Andrew Benjamin. I tabled the case until the next day.

The following morning I found on my desk the photographs Art

Ward had taken, a preliminary postmortem report and a memo from the lab that the bullet recovered from the victim's body was a .38 caliber lead slug and was in good enough shape for comparison purposes if I could turn up the gun from which it was fired. There was also a leather bag with a drawstring and an attached note from the local postmaster explaining that it had turned up in a mailbox two blocks from the jewelry store. The bag contained the original of the deposit slip of which I already had the duplicate, two hundred and thirty-three dollars in checks, and no cash.

I had a conference with the lieutenant, then together we went across the street to the third floor of the Municipal Courts Building and had another conference with the circuit attorney. As a result of this conference, all three of us went to see the judge of the Circuit Court for Criminal Causes. When we left there, I had three search warrants in my pocket.

Back in the squad room I tried to phone the Bruer and Benjamin jewelry store, but got no answer. I tried Fred Bruer's apartment number and caught him there. He said he didn't plan to open for business again until after his partner's funeral.

"I want to take another look at

your store," I told him. "Can you meet me there?"

"Of course," he said. "Right now?"

"Uh-huh."

He said he would leave at once. As Police Headquarters was closer to the store than his apartment, I arrived first, though. He kept me waiting about five minutes.

After he had unlocked the door and led me inside, I got right to the point. I said, "I want to see the .38 revolver you keep here."

Fred Bruer looked at me with what I suspected was simulated puzzlement. "There's no gun here, Sergeant."

"Your brother-in-law bought one next door right after you opened for business, Mr. Bruer. He told Mr. Jacobs it was for protection against robbers."

"Oh, that," Bruer said with an air of enlightenment. "He took that home with him years ago. I objected to it being around. Guns make me nervous."

I gave him the fishy eye. "Mind if I look?"

"I don't see why it's necessary," he said haughtily. "I told you there's no gun here."

Regretfully I produced the search warrant. He didn't like it, but there was nothing he could do about it. I went over the place thoroughly. There was no gun there.

"I told you he took the gun home," Bruer said in a miffed voice.

"We'll look there if we don't find it at your apartment," I assured him. "We'll try your place first."

"Do you have a search warrant for there, too?" he challenged.

I showed it to him.

I followed his car back to his place. Paula Benjamin and Cindy were no longer there. Bruer said they had returned home last night. I searched the apartment thoroughly, too. There was no gun there.

"Let's take a ride down to your sister's," I suggested. "You can leave your car here and we'll go in mine."

"I suppose you have a warrant for there, too," he said sourly.

"Uh-huh," I admitted.

Paula Benjamin still lived at the same address recorded in the pawnshop gun log, 1726 Eichelberger Street, which is far down in South St. Louis. It was a small frame house of five rooms.

Mrs. Benjamin claimed she knew nothing of any gun her husband had ever owned, and if he had ever brought a revolver home, she had never seen it.

I didn't have to produce my third warrant, because she made no objection to a search. I did just as thorough a job as I had at the other two places. Little Cindy followed

me around and helped me look, but neither of us found the gun. It wasn't there.

Paula Benjamin naturally wanted to know what it was all about. Until then, her brother had shown no such curiosity, which led me to believe he already knew. Belatedly, he now added his demand for enlightenment. I suggested that Cindy be excluded from the discussion.

By now it was pushing noon, so Mrs. Benjamin solved that by taking Cindy to the kitchen and giving the girl her lunch. When she returned to the front room alone, I bluntly explained things to both her and her brother.

After carefully giving Fred Bruer the standard spiel about his constitutional rights, I said, "I reconstruct it this way, Mr. Bruer. You got down to the store early yesterday morning and made out the weekly bank deposit. Only you didn't put any cash in that leather bag; just the deposit slip and the checks. And you didn't put any money in the cash registers. You simply pocketed it. Then you drove two blocks away, dropped the bag into a mailbox, and got back to the store before your brother-in-law arrived for work. I rather suspect you didn't unlock the front door until after you shot him and had hidden the gun, because you wouldn't want to risk having a customer walk in on

you. Then you unlocked the door and phoned the police."

Paula Benjamin was staring at me with her mouth open. "You must be crazy," she whispered. "Fred couldn't kill anyone. He's the most softhearted man in the world."

"Particularly about you and Cindy," I agreed. "You would be surprised what tigers softhearted men can turn into when their loved ones are threatened. None of your brother's fellow merchants on Franklin, and probably none of your neighbors around here knew what your husband was trying to do to you, because both of you believe in keeping your troubles secret. But I've read your deceased husband's divorce affidavit, Mrs. Benjamin."

Paula Benjamin blinked. She gazed at her brother for reassurance and he managed a smile.

"You know I wouldn't do anything like that, sis," he said. "The sergeant has simply made a terribly wrong guess." He looked at me challengingly. "Where's the gun I used, Sergeant?"

"Probably in the Mississippi River now," I said. "Unfortunately I didn't tumble soon enough to search for it before you had a chance to get rid of it. We can establish by Max Jacob's gun log that your brother-in-law purchased such a gun, though."

"And took it home years ago, Sergeant. Or took it somewhere. Maybe he sold it to another pawnshop."

"I doubt that," I said.

"Prove he didn't."

That was the rub. I couldn't. I took him downtown and a team of three of us questioned him for the rest of the day, but we couldn't shake his story. We had him repeat his detailed description of the imaginary bandit a dozen times, and he never varied it by a single detail.

Finally we had to release him. I drove him home, but the next morning I picked him up again and we started the inquisition all over. About noon, he decided he wanted to call a lawyer, and under the new rules stemming from recent Supreme Court decisions, we either had to let him or release him again.

I knew what would happen in the former event. The lawyer would accuse us of harassing his client and would insist we either file a formal charge or leave him alone. We didn't have sufficient evidence to file a formal charge, and if we refused to leave him alone, his lawyer undoubtedly would get a court injunction to make us.

With all the current talk about police brutality, we didn't need any publicity about harassing a sixty-year-old, undersized, widely es-

teemed small businessman. We let him go.

I'm in the habit of talking over cases which particularly disturb me with my wife. That evening I unloaded all my frustrations about the Andrew Benjamin case on Maggie.

After listening to the whole story, she said, "I don't see why you're so upset, Sod. Why do you want to see the man convicted of murder anyway?"

I stared at her. "Because he's a murderer."

"But according to your own testimony, the dead man was a thoroughgoing beast," Maggie said reasonably. "What he was attempting to do to that innocent little girl just to obtain vengeance on his wife was criminally vindictive. This Fred Bruer, on the other hand, you characterize as a thoroughly nice guy who, in general, devotes his life to helping people, and never before harmed a soul."

"You would make a lousy cop," I said disgustedly. "We don't happen to have two sets of laws, one for nice guys and the other for beasts. Sure, Fred Bruer's a nice guy, but do you suggest we give all nice guys a license to kill?"

After thinking this over, she said reluctantly, "I guess not." She sat musing for a time, then finally said, "If he's really as nice a guy as you say, there's one technique you might

try. Why don't you shame him into a confession?"

I started to frown at her, then something suddenly clicked in my mind and the frown came out a grin instead. Getting up from my easy chair, I went over and gave her a solid kiss.

"I take back what I said about you being a lousy cop," I told her. "You're a better cop than I am."

At ten the next morning I phoned Fred Bruer. "I have an apology to make, Mr. Bruer," I said. "We've caught the bandit who killed your brother-in-law."

"You what?"

"He hasn't confessed yet, but we're sure he's the man. Can you come down here to make an identification?"

There was a long silence before he said, "I'll be right there, Sergeant."

As soon as the little jeweler arrived at headquarters, I took him to the showup room. It was already darkened and the stage lights were on. Lieutenant Wilkins was waiting at the microphone at the rear of the room. I led Bruer close to the stage, where we could see the suspects who would come out at close range. When we were situated, Wilkins called for the lineup to be sent in.

Five men, all of similar lanky build, walked out on the stage. All were dressed in tan slacks and tan

leather jackets. When they lined up in a row, you could see by the height markers behind them that they were all within an inch, one way or the other, of six feet.

The first one to walk out on stage was exactly six feet tall. He had straight black, greasy-looking hair, a dark complexion and a prominent hooked nose. A thin white scar ran from the left corner of his mouth to his left ear and there was a hairy mole in the center of his right cheek. He stood with hands at his sides, the backs facing us. On the back of the left hand was the tattoo of a blue snake wound around a red heart.

I glanced at Fred Bruer and saw that his eyes were literally bugging out.

"Don't try to pick anyone yet," I said in a low voice. "Wait until you hear all the voices." Then I called back to Wilkins, "Okay, Lieutenant, let's hear them."

Lieutenant Wilkins said over the microphone, "Number one step forward."

The dark man with the hooked nose stepped to the edge of the stage.

Wilkins said, "What is your name?"

"Manuel Flores," the man said sullenly.

"Your age?"

"Forty."

There is a standard set of questions asked all suspects at a showup, designed more to let witnesses hear their voices than for gathering information. But now Lieutenant Wilkins departed from the usual routine.

He said, "Where do you work, Manuel?"

"The Frick Construction Company."

"As what?"

"Just a laborer."

"Are you married, Manuel?"

"Yes."

"Any children?"

"Five."

"Their ages?"

"Maria is thirteen, Manuel Jr. is ten, Jose is nine, Miguel is six and Consuelo is two."

"Have you ever been arrested before, Manuel?"

"No."

"Ever been in any kind of trouble?"

"No."

"Okay," Lieutenant Wilkins said. "Step back. Number two step forward."

He went through the same routine with the other four men, but I don't think Fred Bruer was even listening. He kept staring at number one.

When the last of the five had performed, and all of them had been led off the stage, Fred Bruer and I

left the showup room and went down one flight to Homicide. He sank into a chair and stared up at me. I remained standing.

"Well?" I said.

The jeweler licked his lips. "I can understand why you picked up that first man, Sergeant. He certainly fits the description of the bandit. But he isn't the man, I'm sorry to say."

After gazing at him expressionlessly for a few moments, I gave my head a disbelieving shake. "Your friends along Franklin Avenue and your sister all warned me you were softhearted, Mr. Bruer, but don't be softheaded, too. It's beyond belief that two different men could have such similar appearances, even to that scar, the mole and the tattoo. On top of that, Manuel Flores is left-handed, just like your bandit."

"But he's not the man," he said with a quaver in his voice. "It's just an incredible coincidence."

"Yeah," I said. "So incredible, I don't believe it. You're letting his formerly clean record and his five kids throw you. He has no alibi for the time of the robbery. He told his wife he was going to work that day, but he never showed up. The day after the robbery he paid off a whole flock of bills." I let my voice become sarcastic. "Claims he hit a long-shot horse."

Fred Bruer's voice raised in pitch.

"I tell you he really isn't the man!"

"Oh, come off it," I said grumpily. "Are you going to protect a killer just because he has five kids?"

The little jeweler slowly rose to his feet. Drawing himself to his full five feet six, he said with dignity, "Sergeant, I told you that is not the man who shot Andy. If you insist on bringing him to trial, I will swear on the stand that he is not the man."

After studying him moodily, I shrugged. "I think we can make it stick anyway, Mr. Bruer. Once we net the actual culprit in a case like this, we usually manage to get a confession."

He frowned. "What do you mean by that?"

"Manuel Flores isn't as influential a citizen as you are, Mr. Bruer. He's just a poor, uneducated slob and not even a United States citizen yet. He's a Mexican immigrant who only has his first papers. He doesn't know any lawyers to call. We don't have to handle him with kid gloves, like we did you."

"You mean you intend to beat a confession out of him!" Bruer said, outraged.

"Now, who said anything about that?" I inquired. "We never use the third degree around here. We merely use scientific interrogation techniques."

I took his elbow and steered him

to the door. "If you decide to cooperate after all, you can let me know, Mr. Bruer. But I don't think your testimony is essential. I would thank you for coming down, but under the circumstances, I don't think you deserve it."

I ushered him out into the hall, said, "See you around, Mr. Bruer," and walked off and left him.

He was still staring after me when I mounted the stairs leading up from third to fourth.

I found lanky Sam Wiggins in the men's room on fourth. He had removed the wig and false nose and was washing off his makeup, including the snake and heart tattoo.

Sam let out the stained water in the bowl and started to draw more. "How'd it go?" he asked.

I shrugged. "I don't think he suspected anything, but it's too early to guess. We should find out just how softhearted he is when I increase the pressure tomorrow."

I let Fred Bruer stew for twenty-four hours and phoned him about eleven the next morning.

"We're not going to need your testimony after all, Mr. Bruer," I

said. "Manuel Flores has confessed."

"He didn't do it!" Bruer almost yelled. "You can't do that to an innocent man with five kids!"

"Oh, stop being so softhearted," I told him. "The man's a killer." I hung up on him.

Bruer came into the squad room twenty minutes later. His face was pale but his thin shoulders were proudly squared.

"I want to make a statement, Sergeant," he said in a steady voice. "I wish to confess the murder of my brother-in-law."

I pointed to a chair and he seated himself with his back stiffly erect. After phoning for a stenographer, I waited for the familiar glow of triumph I usually feel when a case is finally in the bag.

It didn't come. Over the years, I have trapped suspects into confessions by playing on their greed, their fear, their vindictiveness and every other base emotion you can think of, but this was the first time I had trapped a murderer through his compassion for others. I could only wonder why I was in this business.



Arrogance is an inherent disease which can deafen one to the roar of a lion and blind him to the guile of a fox.



I LEFT the Marine Corps just two weeks after Mama buried what the Florida sheriff had sent her of my little sister.

Now, the Yankee press and TV have a great time poking fun at us South Carolina boys, picturing us all as a bunch of hicksville guys who stand around at the gas station in bib overalls, sucking soda pop and planning Klan raids. Well, I spent eight years in the Marines and I'm not exactly a country boy.

I take that back. Maybe I am, because down my way a country boy puts his family above the

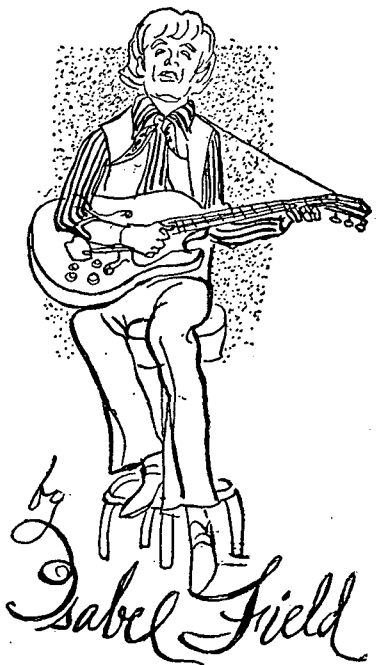
world and you don't touch a man's baby sister, fella, or you're liable to come away without a hand, clear up to the shoulder.

The captain tried to get me to be satisfied with ninety days' emergency leave, but I told him I might not be a desirable Marine when I finished my business, so he gave me my severance pay and shook my hand and I headed home.

Mama was glad to see me at first, and then she wasn't, because she saw the look in my eye.

"You'll just get yourse'f in trou-





le," she told me, but she didn't cry. I guess she was pretty well cried out by then.

"You should have told me about Rose Ann before. I thought she was in college."

"She was, but then she met this man . . ." Mama sagged down into a chair and let me have the whole story.

The guy was one of those drifting kind, a two-bit guitar picker with a country and western outfit out of North Carolina. My sister saw this guy and that was it for her. She took off with him, and Mama didn't see her alive again.

In six months she sent Mama cards from all over, like Memphis, Nashville, Atlanta, Jacksonville. Finally she was in Miami, and the letters were bright over a layer of hurt that cut me up when I read them.

This guy had got a job down in Miami as a regular at a cheap nightclub, but he still hadn't married my sister and she was stupid enough to think he would, just because he had promised. I guess I was that dumb at eighteen too, but I don't remember. Boot camp wiped that out.

Anyway, I read the letters, told Mama to hang on, and headed for Miami. Even though the coroner had put down that my sister died a suicide, of an overdose of sleeping pills mixed with alcohol, I counted it as murder. The letter with the report said she had died in the charity ward, and that we owed the county three hundred dollars.

I hit Miami with a name and an address—Pete Lorimer, Paradise Club—and I had his face printed into every cell of my brain, from a picture Rose Ann had included in one of the letters.

The Paradise Club was a bigger place than I had expected. It had a dance floor, a bandstand, lots of tables and a long shiny bar. I went in although it was just noon and the janitor was still swabbing last

night's muck out of the corners.

"Hey, mister, y'all can't come in. We hain't open," the old man called to me.

"I know that. I want to see the owner."

"She don't come in till eight or nine."

"She?"

"Miss Ducaine."

"Well, could I talk to you for a minute?"

"Look, mister, I already done tol' you we hain't open. Bar opens at two, like it says on the sign. You come back, talk to somebody else."

I came back around seven, had a drink, supper, and a couple more drinks. The place was already beginning to fill up, the bar lined with regulars, and somebody had put out a sign that said the band would start up promptly at nine o'clock. There was no sign of this Miss Ducaine so I sat nursing my sour mash and looking the place over. It was like the neighborhood—brassy and loose, and gone rough around the edges—but lively and plenty rough on Friday and Saturday nights. This was Friday. There were three bartenders, a half-dozen waitresses and a bouncer.

Finally I saw the owner come in. She looked like the place, brassy, lively, tough. Around

forty, give or take a year, she was big, maybe five-nine, and cut full all over. She came in and stood behind the bar, looking over the crowd. The bartender on the end, the tall one with the knife-scar along his cheek down to his mouth, pointed toward me because I had asked him about her.

She walked over to my table and stood looking down at me. Up close, she looked hard and chilly. She smiled. "Bart said you was askin' about me."

"Yes, ma'm. I just got out of the Marines and a buddy of mine thought I might be able to find work around here. I saw your place and figured you might just be able to use a guy with my many talents." I stood up when I spoke to her, and smiled the way I had learned to smile at all women of her type. Women like that are the same whether they're working in Tokyo, Saigon, San Diego or Miami. You treat them like a lady and you get what you want, because they're still women, no matter how they make a living, and every woman wants to be a lady.

She smiled again, only this time it was for real. "What are your many talents, honey?"

I shrugged. "For starters, that bouncer you've got on the front door looks like he's soft around the middle."

This time she laughed out loud. "Take him and you get his job, honey."

"What does it pay?"

"A hundred and fifty a week, if you do a good job."

I nodded agreement and left her sitting there at my table while I walked over to the front entrance.

"What's your name, boy?" I said to this character, a big man, around forty. He had muscular shoulders, plenty of bones and meat, but his belly was round and liquor had marked him.

He looked at me, surprised. "Name's Monihan. What you want?"

I smiled. "You're fired, Monihan. Blow."

The big man looked shocked for a second, then started a sudden swing at me, but before he could bring his arm all the way up, I caught it.

"Let's go out back. No need to bust up the place."

The alley was dark except for a dim bulb over the door. We stood for a second in the circle of light and studied each other. His face still looked puzzled under the anger. The scar-mouthed bartender came out and stood leaning against the door.

"Get the pretty boy, Monihan," Scar-mouth urged sharply, a sneer on his ugly face.

Monihan waited no longer. He took a long, squatty plunge forward, feinting with his left, thundering out with his right. I came in, took the right-hand blow on my forearm and hit him hard in the belly. It was like sinking a fist into bread dough. Monihan's wind went out in a blast. He tried to ram a knee into me, but I trapped his arms and hooked a punch into his kidneys, then moved away and circled him.

Monihan shook his head as he pursued me. His mouth was open, gasping for air. His face was red and he stood still, stamping the ground impatiently, a big bull pawing up dirt. Then he came charging in and I fell on him, hanging on while he pounded at me. He heaved me away to get a clear swing and I came in fast, driving for his belly. A sick look came to his mouth and I whirled in and pounded his stomach. The softness caught him, his mouth sprang open, his eyes began to glaze. I finished him with a sharp, up-cutting blow to the chin. He sighed and went down into the dust, face first.

Scar-mouth grunted with disgust and followed me back inside, leaving Monihan there in the dirt.

"Guess you're the newest in her string, pretty boy," he growled.

I didn't bother to answer, just

straightened my tie and wiped the sweat off my face. I was surprised to find a swelling lump on my cheek. I hadn't noticed that he had hit me.

"When do I start work, boss-lady?" I asked, grinning down at her.

"Right now. Supper's on the house. What's your name?"

"Spence . . . Mac Spence," I made up fast, giving my first name as a last name. I didn't want the man I was after to know my name right away.

The band had come in and was tuning up. I studied them from my station at the door. Lorimer came in after the others. He was near my own age, around twenty-six. He had brown hair, bleached white at the edges by the sun, the kind of face that would catch any woman's interest, and probably the kind of lying tongue that played out soft words to pierce a girl's weakness. He felt me staring and looked up; a puzzled expression on his face. Then he put down his guitar and went to the bar for a drink, and I knew he was asking Scar-mouth about me.

The evening passed quickly. There were two fights. I had no trouble handling them, or putting out the usual drunks who hated to see closing time. After I had them all out and had locked the

door, I went over to join the help in a nightcap. Lorimer was there and he sat staring at me as he lit a cigarette.

"You ever been in Charlotte?" he asked slowly, studying my face.

"No."

"Maybe Jacksonville." It was worrying him.

"Passed through yesterday, that's all."

He played with his cigarette and I saw his hands, manicured, long-fingered. "Maybe it was Columbia, South Carolina."

"You didn't see me," I answered.

"Yes, I have. I'll get it yet."

Lucille Ducaine came and slid into the chair next to him. He took her hand absently, still thinking about me.

"You talk too much, buddy," I said slowly.

He blew out a gust of cigarette smoke and I could see the spark of anger in his blue eyes. He had a bow-shaped red mouth, his sideburns were long and curling. I stared at him, thinking of my sister, remembering how she had liked laughter and music and sunlight. This scum had dirtied her, playing with her the same way he no doubt played with other girls who stood at the foot of the bandstand and stared up at him, seeing no further than the face, hearing only his tomcat baritone.



As I stared, I thought that sometime Rose Ann must have known exactly what kind of man he was, and that was when she began to die. Now, that same man sat here drinking and smoking and smiling at the Ducaine woman. I wanted to tear him apart, but it came to me that it couldn't be that fast; it had to be a slow squeezing out of life. This man had to squirm and sweat and cry out before he died. Because he still thought himself someone important, he was unmarked, careless, arrogant. That had to be taken from him, and more. All these thoughts must have showed on my face, because he dropped the woman's hand and got up, pushing back his chair with one foot.

"What you want from me, buddy? Why look at me like a hungry lion?"

"Keep on with the dumb questions and I'll knock your teeth in," I said, smiling pleasantly. I got up and stood at the edge of the table. The others had moved away, seeing what was coming.

"Boy, you want trouble, don't you? Well, you got it."

He was ready to fight, but he still hadn't figured me out so he stood there a second, hesitating. I grabbed the edge of the table and smashed it against him. He dropped both hands to stop the table

and I stepped around it fast, hitting him a heavy blow to the face. He fell to the floor, blood coming from a gash on his lip. He started to reach into his jacket, so I jumped in and kicked his wrist, hard, then stepped on his hand with my full weight. He screamed and tried to grab my legs but I fell straight down on him, jerked the knife from his inside pocket, and got back up.

None of the other men interfered. They were the kind who had learned a long time ago not to mix in another man's business. Only the scar-mouthed bartender looked like he wanted to get into it, but I guess maybe he couldn't make up his mind which one of us he hated more so he just stood there wiping his hands on his pants and cursing under his breath.

Lorimer got up slowly, shaking his head to clear the dizziness, and nursing his sore right hand. "I'd like to know what this is all about," he mumbled through the cut lip. "I've seen you somewhere before."

"Stick around and you'll find out."

"You think I'd run from you?" His look was tough, contemptuous. "I've seen worse."

"You'll run, buddy," I said real soft, because I could hardly hold

jack. "You'll run if you're able."

"Come on now, boys. Break it up. Let's go get some rest." Miss Ducaine smoothed it over, took Lorimer by the arm and led him away, but she was looking at me with bright, greedy eyes as she left and I knew she'd drop him if I made a move. I just sat still and waited till they left. Maybe later if I had to, not now.

When I went out the back way to walk to the cheap room I had rented a block from the club, Monihan was waiting for me. I made out the bulky shape of him even before he spoke, and I was ready for anything.

"You dumb jerk," he said, grabbing my arm before I could hit him. "You stupid hick-town hero. Why did you have to show up now?"

Then I saw that he was holding out a cop's badge, and in the dim light from the street lamp I could see that the card with it said he was Daniel M. Riley, sergeant of detectives, Miami Police Department.

I stood there open-mouthed while he cussed me out as well as any DI at Parris Island had ever done. It almost made me homesick. When he finished, I didn't have too much to say, just who I was and what I wanted.

"I know who you are, jerk. I

checked in with the chief after you cooled me. Your mother called him. She was worried about you."

"Are you after Lorimer?"

"No. Lorimer's nothing, just a musician playing the broads for a living. But this particular broad, this Ducaine woman, she and her boys run a nice little side business. They wholesale pills—bennies, barbiturates, amphetamines—even a few bundles of grass. We know about the pills, but we haven't pulled them in because we'd like to get a fix on the rest of the business, like who supplies them. It took me a month to get that job as a bouncer." He sighed and shook his head. "They haven't got anything in for a couple of weeks, so we expect a break soon. The chief wired the Marines about you and they said you were a good man—Silver Star, all that. What the chief wants me to ask is, would you be willing to be our inside man, just for a couple days? We're ready to close in and we'd like an inside man to make it sure."

"All I want is Lorimer."

"Sure, I know that. You'll get him. He'll go to prison with the rest of them. There isn't a man in her crew that doesn't peddle or run errands."

"Prison wasn't exactly what I had in mind."

"Forget that, sonny. Now, do

you want to try it or not? I have to call back in as soon as possible."

I thought about it a minute. It was a way to get them all—the kind of people who ruin other people and don't care. It was plain that Lorimer had thrown my sister over for the Ducaine woman, and it was the pills he helped peddle which had killed my sister.

"All right, I'll help. What do you want me to do?"

"Do what you've been doing. Move in, flirt with the Ducaine woman. I'll hang around the neighborhood, like I have for the past month or so. Every morning you check in at this telephone number. Use a different phone each time. Mostly I'll be in the pool hall down from the club. You want me, yell real loud."

"Exactly what is it I'm to look for?"

"Names, suspicious shipments or boxes, who brings them in. Like that. Most of these pills are carried out of town by truck drivers on the long hauls, and plenty of those drivers pass through the Paradise Club. We have most of them marked. But what we need now is a line on the supplier. There's only the three of us—you, me, and an outside man. There was another man but we found him dead in a trash box last week."

"I'll do the best I can for you."

He went away, and I went up and went to bed in the crummy room. I didn't get much sleep, thinking about Lorimer, and the rest of it. After breakfast I tried the number Riley had given me.

"This is Spence MacLeod," I said cautiously.

"Yes?"

"Riley told me to call in."

"Nice to hear from you." The voice at the other end was a low-pitched, softly drawling woman's voice, nice but impersonal.

I couldn't think of anything to say, just stood there looking at the receiver. Finally the woman at the other end laughed a little.

"Welcome to the team, Spence MacLeod. Report in again tomorrow." Then she hung up.

I felt like a dummy as I went out to do some shopping. I bought a blue shirt, a silk tie, a map of Miami, and then took my car to a garage near the club and had the oil changed. All the time I studied the neighborhood. At the garage I memorized the map and how the area I was in fit into the city. It was a thing I was good at, having been in and out of Hai Phong, Hanoi, and a few other choice places with less to study. Miami was simple.

At two o'clock I checked into the Paradise Club. The janitor

was just leaving but he paused.

"See you had that talk with the boss," he said slyly.

Maybe he could see the bulge of my .45 automatic in my belt.

"I talk plain," I said, scowling at him. He went away fast.

"You sure think you're one rough guy," Scar-mouth commented sourly as he polished the bar and got ready to serve the first customer, who had just come in.

I shrugged. "Why not?"

"That Lorimer, he won't run. He cut up the last guitar-man. That's how he got his job."

"So? Just stay out of it."

He let me alone after that, and I sat at the bar sipping a soft drink. Alcohol doesn't help the aim or the coordination. It was around eight o'clock when the phone behind the bar rang. It rang twice, then stopped, then rang again. Scar-mouth answered.

"Okay, okay. See you at twelve." That was all I made out of his end of the conversation. Then he motioned to Lucille Ducaine. "The laundryman's bringing those towels and cloths," he called.

I thought about it. It didn't seem like anything important, but that phone behind the bar hadn't rung once since I had been in the place. Now it had just rung twice and the guy just stood there, waiting till it stopped and rang again.

Maybe. I headed toward the men's room as soon as I could and ducked out the back entrance. There was a pay phone at the gas station across the street. I dialed the number Riley had given me.

"Yes?" came that husky drawl. I wondered for an instant what the gal looked like.

"MacLeod. Somebody's coming to the back door at midnight. The laundryman, they said."

"Anything suspicious?"

I told her about the way the telephone had rung.

"Be careful. We'll check into it."

"Okay," I said and hung up fast, then slipped in the back door. No one had missed me. I ambled around the room, smiling at a pair of gals who looked like they were maybe all of sixteen under piles of make-up. I wanted to tell them to clear out, to go home and wash their faces and do their homework, but nobody else seemed to care so I let it lay.

The evening was slow until the band showed at nine. Lorimer's lip was patched with a hunk of tape and he watched me all the time he was playing and singing. I just stood at the door and stared back, never taking my eyes off his face. At eleven-thirty the band took a quarter-hour break and I followed them out the back door. All I could think of was Lorimer.

The thing moved in me like a hot snake. As I came out, Lorimer was just lighting a cigarette and suddenly the peculiar odor of it hit me. It was the ropy smell of scorched hemp; marijuana.

"Want a drag, man?" the drummer asked me, grinning wickedly as he waited for Lorimer to share the weed.

"No, thanks."

I went over and stood looking at Lorimer. He sighed and sucked in a deep lungful of the acrid smoke, holding it in his lungs for a long time, then expelling it slowly, with the practiced air of a regular user.

"Don't bug me anymore, man," he whispered.

"Why, I'm not bugging you." But I kept on staring at his face till his eyes dropped. He took another long drag and passed it on to the drummer.

"You make me tired," he said. Then he lunged at me, punching me solidly in the shoulder.

I hit him back with a fast one-two and sent him crashing down against a garbage can.

"You like rough stuff, boy, you got it," I told him.

He came up off the ground low, diving in at me. I braced for it and brought my knee up square in his face. The crack of my knee on impact was sharp in the quiet al-

ley. The other musicians had faded back into the dark. Lorimer came up on his hands and knees but he couldn't quite get up. He hung there, crouched to protect himself. The blood was squirting from his nose and I guessed it was badly broken.

I dusted off my hands and smiled at him, then started to go back inside. I saw him get up and drag himself in the door behind me. There was a mirror on the wall and he stopped to assess the damage. It shocked him and he stood there touching his face gingerly.

"Damn you, you scarred me." He let out a string of ugly words as I stood there laughing at him.

"That's tough, lover-boy. Be hard for you to attract the ladies now, won't it?"

I started to go back into the main room, but just then I heard a truck pull up outside and I remembered about the police trap. Lucille Ducaine came over and looked at Lorimer and they talked in a whisper, Lorimer looking at me with a crazy expression on his face. She just grinned at me and shook her head, like I was a very naughty boy whose antics amused her. Then she went outside and Lorimer went along. As I stood there hesitantly, the scar-mouthed bartender came by and went out,

too, and I stepped to the door to block it.

I saw a car come in at the wide end of the alley and heard Riley's voice call out loudly for everyone to stand still.

A man who was unloading a sack of something from the laundry truck cursed and reached into his coat. I fired one quick shot and dropped him, and then the alley was full of noise. Out of the corner of my eye I saw Lorimer take off, running into the narrow end of the alley, and I went after him. He went scrambling down the alley and across the street to a hole between two buildings. I sprinted and came close on him. There was another alley back of the buildings.

That alley was dark, and I stopped and listened, trying to remember how the neighborhood lay. The sound of footsteps drew me and I ran into the dark and came around a stack of boxes just in time to see Lorimer disappear into the rear door of a ramshackle three-story building.

I knew there was a store on the first floor, and I remembered that the two upper floors appeared vacant, maybe used for storage.

I hurried to the door and opened it cautiously, looking into a long, narrow hallway lined with boxes and lit only by the red exit light

above my head. It was like looking down a gun barrel. I slid inside and stopped to listen. The sound of running footsteps came from above and I moved to the stairs. The place smelled musty and unclean, the odors of a thousand things and a thousand people clung to the gray walls, releasing dark smells into the still air.

I climbed the stairs silently, setting one foot at a time on one step at a time. There was no hurry. I could still hear the scrabbling sounds of Lorimer as he fled up to the third floor.

It was a dead end up there, with only the fire escape as a way down. Going up had been a mistake. He was treed like a raccoon with a dog on its heels. Maybe he'd know it soon. Even a raccoon fights when it's trapped.

Looking cautiously down the hallway, I saw him at the far end, fumbling with the door to the fire escape, but it was stuck tight.

"Lorimer," I called.

He groaned and threw himself down to hide in the dark corner by the door.

"Is that you, MacLeod?"

I didn't answer,

"Your name is MacLeod, isn't it?" he called. "You're Rose's brother, aren't you?"

"Get up, boy. You talk too much," I answered.

"That face of yours, there was something about it that stuck in my mind the minute I saw it. It just came to me now."

"Get up and put your hands behind your head."

"That sister of yours, she was nothing but trouble from the minute I first saw her. She changed my luck so it went all sour. I thought it was different when I met Lucille, but it wasn't. That was all part of the same lousy package."

I heard him shift around, making the floor creak, and I held the gun on him. His voice came out again, breathless and whining.

"She came of her own free will. I didn't drag her. She was old enough to know the score. I tried to tell her to go home, but she wouldn't. Just hung on, nagging and begging."

Then I heard a new sound in the dark, and I knew that he had a gun and the sound was the safety clicking off. I dropped to the floor just as he fired a shot and the bullet smashed into wood and plaster near my head.

Another shot came crashing out of his end of the hall. I fired three times where it had showed him to be, and in the racket I heard him scream and fall to the floor. Then it was quiet, and back in the stink of the powder I could see him twisting and hear his breath guttering out.

Groaning softly, he said, "Leave me alone, MacLeod. I'll never touch another woman."

"I know that, if I don't know anything else."

"Rose Ann smiled back at me, so is this fair?"

"What you made her do to herself, was that fair?"

He didn't answer. I waited for him to move again, but then I realized that the only one breathing in that dirty hall was myself.

I put my .45 back into my belt and turned to find Riley puffing up the stairs.

"I was going to bring him in, but he had a gun," I said.

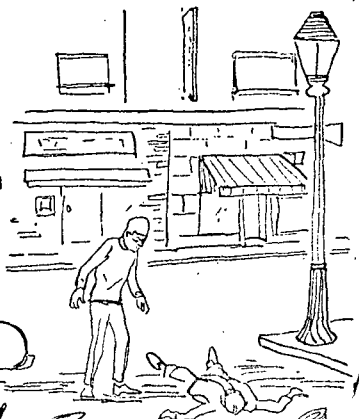
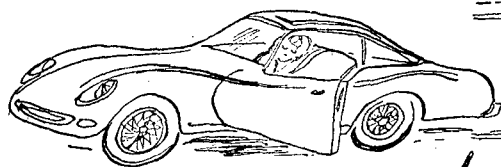
"Sure." Riley looked over at Lorimer in the beam of his flashlight. "Sure you were. Well, come on along and tell it to the chief."



That old cliché, "any port in a storm," does not necessarily preclude indigenal security hazards.



FINAL NEWS REPORT



by Ernest Butner

ONE sickening glance was all that he needed—the man sprawled in the crosswalk was beyond help. Whirling, Joel raced back to the car.

"Whassa matter, hon?" Lisa asked in a thick tongue. "Whatcha stop for?"

He didn't answer. His teeth were clamped together tightly, a dry lump wedged in his throat. He slid the gear lever even before he'd completely closed the door, and his foot slammed hard against the accelerator. The powerful, low-slung hardtop sprang alive, its motor roaring loudly on the almost de-

serted, dark stretch of boulevard.

Joel hunched forward, his breath short and harsh, his eyes searching the rear-view mirror for signs of traffic behind them. The late hour and thin veil of chilling February mist were apparently in his favor. A firm grip on the wheel kept his hands steady, but the frantic pounding in his chest continued.

"Well, 'sall right if you don't wanna talk." Lisa yawned. "Betcha I know why you stopped."

Her head pressed against his

shoulder and he knew she'd drifted into her alcoholic trance again. It was her car, and driving it one of her special thrills, but she'd been in no condition for that tonight.

She'd had good reason for celebration, he reflected. Shooting the picture had kept her under heavy strain. As high-strung as she was, and a perfectionist, he could easily imagine the extra exertion she'd poured into her very first leading role, and there'd been no time for her to relax until after the final shot at Monterey. Then she'd invited him to the party over long-distance telephone.

"I can't very well decline, Joel," she'd said. "They're throwing it for me. A small group, really—a few technicians, some of the cast—but I wouldn't enjoy it without you here. And bring the car up, will you? I'd love driving it home. A leisurely trip down the California coast should be lots of fun."

He'd eagerly arranged time off from his office. A meager clerical job wasn't important, but in Lisa Lilly he knew he had a good thing going. He'd married her after those first Midwestern beauty contests, and tagged along, determined to let her make it for him. Now she was well on the way, and he could look forward to sharing much more than a Malibu apartment and an expensive car.

The glare of approaching headlights snapped Joel from his reverie. Jerking the steering wheel to his right, he guided the car into a dark side street.

Joel cursed under his breath, feeling a keen sense of misfortune. Nothing could bring back the life of the man who had stepped down in front of him from the curb, but he was only too aware of what could happen to him for driving at excessive speed, for failing to pass a sobriety test. It could very well mean imprisonment for manslaughter. He shuddered.

Wandering on back streets, he somehow found his way back to the motel. Undressing Lisa, he realized she'd been carried along too fast. She hadn't even learned to hold her liquor yet, and her silly giggling annoyed him until he finally got her in bed. He fell asleep hours later in a chair.

It seemed minutes afterwards when he was saying, "Get up, Lisa. We'd better hit the road."

She raised up slowly. "Oh, my head. What time is it, Joel?"

"Five."

"In the morning?" Sighing loudly, she sank down again.

"After last night, don't you think we'd better get rolling?"

"Last night?" She looked puzzled. "What about last night?"

"Coming here from the party, I

mean. You know the man is dead."

Suddenly she was sitting very erect on the bed. She pressed her forefingers to her forehead. "Why, I don't remember leaving the party. Joel, what do you mean by somebody dead?"

"Hit by the car. You don't remember?"

Watching her head sway from side to side, he immediately regretted telling her, but it hadn't occurred to him until then that the drinks had temporarily blotted out her memory.

He cleared his throat, his eyes narrow in thought. "You insisted on driving, Lisa. And when it happened, I couldn't get you to stop."

"Oh, Joel, *no!*"

She stared at him a long moment, her cheeks colorless. Then she flung her feet to the floor. "Let's go to the police station. I want to get it over."

"What about your image, your motion picture career?"

"I've got my conscience to live with, too. Hit-run— isn't that horrible, Joel?"

"I won't let you ruin yourself, baby. Who's to know the difference if I swear it was I? I'll take the rap myself, let them send me up for a few years."

Just as he expected, she uttered a quick and desperate, "No!"

She got up and began dressing.

She complained again of a headache and her eyes looked glazed, but there were no tears.

Joel stowed the suitcases in the trunk compartment, then held the car door open for Lisa—on the driver's side, as usual.

She shook her head solemnly. "I'll never drive again, Joel."

On the way out of town, he wondered how much progress the police had already made. A nagging urgency to increase his distance from them persisted. The nearest inland freeway would be shorter, faster, and he could cut across the Santa Monica mountains near the end of the trip.

"Breakfast, baby?" he asked.

"I couldn't eat."

"Maybe a cup of coffee would help?"

She did not respond.

"How about it, Lisa?"

"How about what?"

"Coffee, I said."

"No, thanks."

Then Joel noticed the brilliantly flashing signal directly behind them. His body pulled stiffly erect, his breath catching in his throat. Feeling a sudden dampness in his palms, he swerved the car to the shoulder.

"See your license, please?"

Joel, with trembling fingers, fished it from his wallet. While the officer scanned it in the beam of his

flashlight, Joel swallowed and waited.

"Faulty headlight."

"Just tell me where and I'll get it corrected immediately."

The officer returned the license. "Two miles ahead, on your left. Be sure you do."

Moments after they started moving again, Lisa whispered nervously, "He's following, Joel—following us there!"

Joel frowned. He'd been stupid in failing to check the front of the car, and a new fear stirred within him. He knew exactly what the police lab could do with a thread of cloth, a particle of torn flesh, or a single strand of hair. Arriving at the service station, he saw the patrol car pull out and around, its taillights vanishing over a hill.

Joel got out of the car and hastily inspected the front before the attendant reached his side. Half the lens on the right headlight was missing, but there was nothing really incriminating visible to him.

"Must've hit a rock, mister."

"Probably did," Joel said. "Better replace the beam and fill the tank."

The man got busy. Joel watched him closely, uneasily. Suppose the other part of the lens was discovered in the crosswalk and the pieces matched?

"Heading south?"

Joel nodded.

"May need your lights on all morning. Storm moving in from the Pacific. Already raining down the line."

As they started off again, Lisa glanced in his direction. "Last night, Joel, you said I kept going. How'd you know the man was dead?"

"News broadcast," he told her after a brief pause. "In the motel. You hadn't awakened."

"That policeman—I almost screamed before he went away. I don't know how much more of this I can take."

He noticed her hands twisting together on her lap. "Get hold of yourself, baby. Give it time to cool."

He found music on the radio, and leaning back on the cushion as they shot along the freeway, he was aware that his own tension had subsided. Sure of Lisa's devotion to him, he believed she'd be able to control her feelings.

Then they ran into the rain, only a sprinkle at first, and then a downpour. Any telltale traces, he decided, would be washed from the car. He kept the speedometer needle just below the legal limit until they approached the restaurant parking lot south of Santa Barbara.

"Come on," he said. "You'll feel better with something inside you."

Lisa only nibbled at her tuna

salad. "I think everyone must be staring at our table."

"Why shouldn't they?" he asked with a chuckle. "You're Lisa Lilly. Getting to be a pretty famous movie star."

"Hurry up. *Please*. Let's get out of here."

The weather report warned motorists that chains would be required in higher elevations and predicted the snow level would drop during the night, but Joel had always considered the Santa Monica range little more than a jumble of near-barren hills. Besides, he'd have plenty of time to cover the cutoff to Malibu before nightfall.

When they swung down the off ramp, Joel glanced at Lisa. Teeth pressed deeply into her underlip, her eyes were focused intently on the road, a narrow strip of asphalt that spiraled upward around rugged canyon walls. Reaching over, he gently touched her wringing hands.

"Shall I take it slower?"

"It isn't that."

"Like I said, you've got to give it time to cool."

"I'm trying, I'm *trying*!"

He increased the volume of the radio to block out the monotonous whir of wiper blades and heater fan. They'd reached the summit, a rocky wilderness of stubby brush,

and a furious wind blasted the side of the car. He fed more gas to the carburetor, anxious to push behind the last few miles of a particularly harassing trip.

The curve loomed up, deceptively sharp. Startled, Joel hit the brake too hard and sent the car into a skid. His breath seemed to have stopped while he fought for control, but he knew instantly that he was up against a helpless struggle on the treacherously slick surface of the road.

They were sliding crazily toward a low embankment, then starting over it. Even as he felt the jolt, he was conscious of the door on Lisa's side springing open. He heard her scream as she was catapulted from the car.

His vision was blocked completely as the hood swung high. Then it dropped downward sharply and he gazed into the depths of the canyon, terrified. His eyes squeezed shut and he held onto the wheel frantically on the wild ride down. It ended in a jarring crunch, and once more he could hear the wind and rain.

Joel opened his eyes slowly, immediately aware that he wasn't injured; maybe a few scratches and bruises, but nothing serious. By some miracle, he'd survived the rough plunge downward without any real bodily harm.

He was lying in a cramped position across the cushion. Raising his head, he could see that the car had come to a stop against a boulder. It was standing almost upright again, but what had been a sleek hardtop was a mass of metal hammered down to half its normal size. Not more than three or four inches of daylight showed between the body and the top.

A boulder had pushed into the opening where the door beside Lisa had been. Squirming around awkwardly, Joel kicked at the door on the other side, but it was hopelessly warped and wouldn't budge. Panic stirred inside him with the sudden knowledge that he was trapped.

"Joel!"

He peered out to see Lisa stumbling down the soggy slope. She was moving too agilely to have been very badly hurt, and he gathered that her fall from the car must have been softened considerably by the mushy earth.

"I'm all right," he assured her, calmed by the fact that she'd be physically able to go for help. "But it'll take a torch to cut me out of this mess."

She stood panting beside the car, staring into his face. Mud clung to her sweater and skirt, and the cold rain had plastered her hair to her skull.

He found her coat and extended

it through the narrow gap. "Flag a ride to the beach, Lisa, and send somebody back to cut me out."

For a long moment she looked at him, wide-eyed, without speaking. Then she took the coat, wrapped it around her, and began the long scramble to the road; her second shock of the day, he reminded himself as she gradually climbed from sight.

Suppose he'd been driving alone? At such a steep angle, the wreckage couldn't be spotted from the road. There was no guard rail between the shallow embankment the car had leaped and himself, no shattered guard rail to indicate a crash. The tire marks above were probably already washed from the earth. Besides, what foolish motorist would dare stop on such a curve? Joel knew that it could have taken weeks, months, before the crash was sighted.

Now, he could count on Lisa to make the cramped and miserable waiting short. With luck, she might find a telephone before she got to Malibu, but the houses in the hills were few and far apart.

The wind crackled in the underbrush and pelted the raindrops against Joel's face. Water settled on the upholstery. It seeped into his jacket and pants and, like icy claws, prickled his skin. He coughed, feeling a tightness in his chest, a raw-

ness in his throat. Puffs of vapor spread from his mouth.

He wondered about Lisa. How much progress had she made? Listening intently, he tried to detect the hum of a motor, the squishing of tires, but the raging elements beat out all other sound.

The clouds looked darker, lower, almost nudging the ragged hilltops above. Raising his left wrist, Joel examined a cracked crystal and dented dial. The hands were frozen at 3:15. He had no idea how long he'd lain there, but his clothes were soaking wet. He locked his jaws together tightly to still his chattering teeth.

The short February day slid quickly behind the hills. A numbness crept over him, the painful shivering ceased, and he wondered vaguely what could have happened to Lisa. Why hadn't she sent somebody back with a torch? Fever burned in his cheeks, pressed his eyelids down.

A voice, barely perceptible, pierced the thick black layers that had enveloped his mind. The sound brought Joel a feeble spark of hope

until, with a stab of dejection, he realized the voice had drifted from the radio.

It had been on all along, but with the volume knob shaken in the crash, too low to hear above the storm. Now that the wind had subsided, if the power of the battery were still strong, he might be able to blast the speaker up loud enough to stop a passing motorist.

He raised his body slowly. It was no longer raining; it was snowing. The ache in his flesh had dug to the bone and the simple act of moving his arm was an ordeal. His fingers searched in the darkness, finally touching the volume control. He twisted it as far as it would go, but there was barely enough juice left to bring the newscast to his own ears:

"Starlet Lisa Lilly was hospitalized early this evening, her condition described as serious, and Malibu deputies, who found her wandering aimlessly along Pacific Coast Highway, reported her response to questions regarding the whereabouts of her husband as completely incoherent..."



It is the older homes that may give one that lived-in feeling.



to be renewed and this place seems to be what I need. You've been hinting things about the house since I first called you. Now that I've bought it and can't back out of the deal, suppose you tell me what it is."

"Might be better if you didn't hear."

I pushed my hands deep into my raincoat pockets. The house stood on a deserted spit of wooded land that fingered out into the river, and the original stone shell was sup-

THE RAIN had stopped for the moment. A brisk, raw wind off the river drove black clouds low and fast just above the roof, making the house look more somber than ever.

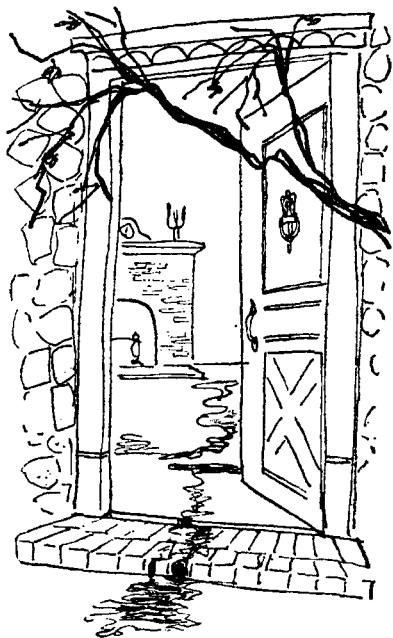
Neal, the real estate man, settled his hat firmly on his uncut white hair. "You sure you know what you're doing, Mr. McCready?"

I clapped him on the back. "I know my lease in town isn't going

posed to have been erected around 1737. People who lived in it had added wings, so now it sprawled low and rambling under the trees, the center section square and boxy and dark, built of the original weathered fieldstone, with the wings lower and somehow lacking the patina of age the architect had tried to achieve.

"Be brave," I told Neal. "If you

don't tell me, someone else will, and I understand you are a reliable authority. And stop worrying. I need that big kitchen for a studio, and living in one of the wings will be luxurious compared to the cramped apartment I have now. I



couldn't care less if the Devil himself lived in there."

The old eyes glanced at me quickly. "All right. About thirty years ago, a couple named George and Julia bought this house through me. The last names are not important. I don't suppose anyone ever invented a word to describe Julia. Beautiful blonde, I guess you'd call her, but a completely

hate-filled, vicious type who was never known to say a good word about anyone. Her husband was the other extreme, one of the nicest people you could ever meet. A fine gentleman in every sense of the word."

The rain misted down again and I led him to the protection of the low portico.

"For years, the man took every indignity that woman could heap on him. I suppose when he couldn't stand it anymore, he decided to leave her. A neighbor walking his dog one night heard a loud argument, not one-sided as usual, but a man's voice and a woman's voice. The next day, someone passing noticed the door wide open. He passed again an hour later. It was still open. He looked inside."

The trees did little to break the wind off the river. *Going to be a cold winter*, I thought.

"The place was a shambles, with blood everywhere. He called the police and the police found them. As nearly as they could piece it out, George started to leave when Julia shot him. He must have gone after her then. She emptied the gun into him, retreating from room to room. He caught her in the kitchen and that's where they found them, his hands around her throat so tightly, the police could hardly pry them loose."

DIE, GEORGE!

I shrugged. "Not the most pleasant story I ever heard, but how does it affect the house?"

"We didn't have anything as fancy as a full-time medical examiner in those days. This was mostly farm country, just beginning to build up. Whenever something happened, they called in old Doc Strawn. Doc found six bullet holes in George and he swore by his Hippocratic oath, any one of them should have killed the man. Yet that man chased the woman through the house and had enough strength left to strangle her." He paused. "Sure, he must have really hated her, but even years of hate can't drive a dead man."

"No one was there. No one really knows what happened."

"The story was written in blood."

"You still haven't explained what it has to do with the house right now, today."

"They took the bodies away and buried them, but something was left behind," he said slowly. "Everyone who has lived here since has had the same experience. They are wakened by the angry voices of a man and woman in the middle of the night. If that isn't frightening enough in itself, after a time even the most compatible find themselves arguing and building up a hate for each other. Yet the minute they leave the house, they're all

right, just as they were before."

I ended the story with a wave and a grin. "Then I have nothing to worry about. I'm not married."

"I know," he said. "That's why I consented to sell the house to you. Selling it to a couple would be a waste of time. I understand you're putting it to use already."

"A client named Snow wants a photograph of a model dressed in Colonial costume against an authentic background. I showed him that walk-in fireplace in the kitchen and he wouldn't settle for anything else, so I've moved in some equipment. My assistant is picking the model up now."

He nodded slowly. "Sounds fine." He held out his hand. "I wish you luck."

"Don't worry," I said. "I've always found it difficult to believe in ghosts or poltergeists or whatever you want to call them." I grinned. "If they don't bother me, I won't bother them."

He was turning out of the long gravel driveway when Richie Kastani wheeled my station wagon down the road. I waited, curious to see the model Charlie Snow had insisted on sending out for his authentic Colonial scene. I hoped Charlie knew what he was doing. Birgitte Nordquist, a blonde, Nordic type, he'd said. Photographs like a dream. Will look like one of

the early Swedish settlers who landed here.

I hoped so. I disliked using a model I never met, without the opportunity to turn her down if I didn't like her.

Worrying was a waste of energy. I could see that from the grin on Richie's swarthy face, the freshly combed dark hair and the way he ran around the car to hold the door for her. Richie wasn't old enough to be blasé about beautiful women, but it took something special to make him act like this.

My first impression was that she was tall, only because she was so slender. The aquiline nose might have been a shade too large, the deep blue eyes too widely spaced, the generous mouth too full, the silky blonde hair a little too ashen—none of it mattered. If her features weren't perfect individually, together they guaranteed she was unable to walk down any street in the world without turning heads.

Her smile was warm enough to make me forget the cold rain. "Mr. McCready," she said. The accent was soft.

"Paul," I said automatically. "Come in. You brought your costume?"

She nodded and I held the door open for her. Inside, she paused, her eyes puzzled. "This is an old house?"

"Yes, it is. A very old house."

"There is something here."

It was my turn to look puzzled.

"I have this . . ." She looked for a word. "I feel things," she said. She frowned. "A woman," she said softly. "An evil woman lived here."

I chuckled. "So they tell me."

"It was not too long ago."

"The details are not important. Nothing for you to worry about."

She shivered. "It is very bad in this room."

I made a mental note to talk to her about her interesting ability to pick up the tragedy in the house, but the expression on her face made me consider calling the picture-taking session off. The lens couldn't lie, and Charlie Snow had no use for photos of a worried blonde.

"The place bothers you too much," I said. "Perhaps we'd better not do any shooting."

"No!" she protested. "Let us try. I will do my best."

Charlie was expecting the transparencies the next day, so the least I could do was try. I motioned Richie to show her where to change.

Outside, the rain drove harder. A shutter rattled somewhere and the fire I'd built in the fireplace wavered. The kitchen, half-ringed with my big lights, extension cords curled across the floor, was warm and comfortable. Self-satisfaction

made me smile. Let Neal keep his story about the house. It looked like it would work out very nicely for me.

She came out wearing the long, floor-sweeping dress, her hair pulled back severely, looking more beautiful than ever. I motioned Richie to turn on the lights, and held out my hand. "I'll show you where to stand." She smiled and started forward.

A heavy gust of wind smashed the shutter against the house, there was a loud crack nearby and the lights went out. As they faded, she gave a little scream and I had the quick impression that she was falling. Whether she didn't see it or the long skirt prevented her from stepping over it I didn't know, but she tripped over one of the heavy extension cords. I leaped to catch her, too late.

In the gloom of the dark afternoon, I heard a dull sound as her head hit the stones of the hearth. A sickening quiver hit my stomach. Only once before had I heard a sound like that, when an elderly woman lost her balance on a suddenly stopping bus, her head striking the fare box. She hadn't moved. Neither did Birgitte.

My eyes became accustomed to the dimness. I knelt, turning her over carefully and yelling at Richie to get some water.

The bruise on her temple was already oozing a dark trickle of blood. My hand trembled as I dipped my handkerchief in the water and gently patted her face, panic tightening my chest as I realized she was badly hurt and I couldn't call for help because the phone hadn't been connected yet.

"We'll take the car," I snapped at Richie. "The nearest hospital. You drive."

Richie opened the door and his shoulders sagged. "We can't use the car," he said. "A damned tree fell, broke the power line and landed on it."

I cursed long enough to get over the shock. "Get moving," I told him. "Get to a neighbor and phone for an ambulance. I'll stay here with her."

Since I hadn't moved any furniture in yet, I could do nothing except gently place her on the hearth near the fire, strip off my coat to serve as something of a pillow and cover her with my raincoat.

The rain beat against the windows, drumming faintly on the high old roof. Firelight danced on the walls. I wished Richie would hurry.

The still form on the hearth quivered and a choked scream bubbled from her throat. Thinking she was coming to, I began rubbing her wrists.

"No!" The long drawn-out protest wasn't in her voice at all. It was deeper, throatier. The tone changed suddenly as she thrashed around. I tried to hold her still.

"I'll kill you first, George, I'll kill you."

The hate in the voice hung in the dim kitchen.

The panting, gasping voice went on. "You're not leaving me," she screamed.

I ran a shaking hand over my face. She was still unconscious, eyes closed. As little as I knew about these things, I felt it wasn't normal. After that crack on the head, she should be lying still and quiet.

The throaty voice from the thrashing figure filled the air with a string of angry obscenities, strange and shocking in themselves, blood-chilling coming from that beautiful white face.

"Impossible," I muttered. "She could never talk like that."

I glanced around the kitchen, looking for assistance that wasn't there. The big room seemed colder. I remembered the name George and the story Neal had told me. I refused to accept it. Neal had said the woman Julia had been cold, vicious, that she still existed in this room, that people had heard her.

Julia would have a voice like that. Julia would talk like that.

"No," I told myself. I wouldn't

believe it because I couldn't. Yet I was hearing someone who couldn't be Birgitte.

There was panic and fear in the voice. "I won't let you go, George!"

I walked numbly to the front door, wishing Richie would hurry. The wind-driven rain poured down steadily, making the driveway a miniature lake, the fallen tree forming a dam. I cursed under my breath. It had started out as a good day. Now . . .

Behind me, the throaty, evil voice still came from the quivering, unconscious body, making my blood run cold.

Neal had said people heard the voices before, that couples in this house usually ended hating each other. Did the woman Julia affect all women who entered this house? Or was it because Birgitte was unconscious and helpless?

I remembered how she had hesitated the moment she entered the room, sensing something I'd never felt. Did her sensitivity make her particularly susceptible?

I racked my brain, trying to recall what little I'd ever read of situations like this, and came up with nothing. I'd never believed any of the stories I'd come across or heard, and even now it wouldn't take much of a different explanation to make me forget the one I was being forced to accept.

I turned back. Harsh laughter filled the room. "Fall down and die, George! Why don't you die?"

I told myself it couldn't be that night all over again, a reenactment of that double killing. I rubbed my face. Firelight flared and I wondered why I heard only the woman. Voices, Neal had said, which meant I should be hearing the husband, too. Where was he?

In spite of the fire, I was cold, faced with something I couldn't possibly handle. Aside from the head injury itself, it was obvious Birgitte had to be removed from the house as soon as possible. Perhaps that voice wouldn't stay with her once she was outside.

"Keep back, George, keep back!" The voice held more panic now.

I could imagine the wounded husband, blood streaming, stalking his wife. I shivered. Too damned much imagination, I told myself.

It just wasn't possible. There had to be a rational explanation, one that made more sense than to theorize the spirit of a dead woman could take over the body of another.

I knelt by the quivering figure and tucked the coat around her. She was muttering now, the voice with a note of hysteria. I looked around the huge kitchen, at my camera on the tripod, at the lights still placed around the hearth, absorbing the realism of something

normal, the touch of everyday sanity.

Ridiculous, I thought. There are no ghosts, nothing in the house at all except what was put here by the wild dreamings and imaginings of people who would believe anything.

Far away, the siren of an ambulance rose and fell.

For a while, I had almost believed it. That siren told me it was just an unfortunate accident, that soon everything would be all right.

I felt disappointed in myself. Paul McCready, thirty years old, five years a respected professional photographer, known as a sensible businessman and a growing pillar of the community, never given to panic—and I was ready to believe . . .

I shook my head. The key had to be the husband. No husband, no ghosts. It was something buried deep in Birgitte's own subconscious, nothing to do with this house, the use of the name George a coincidence.

I thought of the laugh I'd have telling the story to Neal, how I'd bury the story connected with this house once and for all.

The ambulance wailed closer.

The husband. The great hate he felt for his wife had kept him moving even though he was dead on his feet. If what Neal said was true,

that same hate wouldn't let his wife take over Birgitte's body without some sort of manifestation on his part.

The voice continued, full of fear. "Die, George, die, damn you. Why don't you die?"

A sudden dislike for that harsh, throaty sound made me grit my teeth. "Shut up," I whispered. "Shut up."

I wished the ambulance would hurry. The wind banged the shutter, rapid pistol shots of sound. Something hurt me, some vague indefinable pain filled my body.

The beautiful white face twisted. "Die, George, damn you, die!"

I didn't know what the voice was talking about. I didn't want to die. But the pain . . .

"Please die, George," the voice whispered.

The pain was greater now and somehow connected with that voice. If that voice were stilled, the pain would go away.

The shutter clattered in the wind, loud reverberating reports that made the pain worse. A sweet, sickening taste was in my mouth, a

warmth that didn't belong, a warmth that made my stomach turn over.

Strange sounds came from that beautiful face, sounds of fear and loathing, words no longer.

My hands trembled. I stared down at the mumbling figure.

The idea persisted that if the voice were stilled, the pain would leave me. My blood roared in my ears. The kitchen grew misty and indistinct, hidden by a red haze. A crystal clear radiance surrounded the beautiful twitching body.

A weird wailing somewhere outside grew louder. I wondered what it was.

"Die, George," the voice pleaded.

My hands, acting on their own, moved to that smooth white throat, to quiet for all eternity that throaty, obscene voice that had filled my house with hate.

The pain inside me slowly eased.

The pain inside me was gone.

A man's voice yelled, "Paul!"

I smiled. My name was George. The open door beckoned. I could leave now. I had wanted to leave this house for a very long time.



A craftsman recognizes his own talents, and takes his direction accordingly.



The Craftsman

by Michael Zuroy

MR. ALFONSE PETTROGGI sat in the middle of the large room on a swivel chair and in the shadows surrounding him were the members of the Special Council convened by the Organization to judge his case. The adjustable ceiling lamp had been lowered so that it spotlighted his face with its vertical furrows and his wiry, restless

figure—not nervous, but impatient.

Tony Winott, Mr. Pettroggi's immediate boss as well as a member of the Council, was speaking. He was a heavyset man with thick hair and a voice that seemed to come from a subterranean cavern. "Alfie wants to resign from the Organization," Tony was saying formally. "The question before the

Council is, does he or don't he get permission."

"There ain't many acceptable reasons," Arnie Boal, on the other side of the circle, said forebodingly.

The senior member present, old "Gimmick" Hapriano, hairless, frail, thickly spectacled, said in his reedy voice, "Nevertheless, there are some. One is health. Perhaps Alfie is not feeling too well. Perhaps Doc should look him over. A certificate from Doc would cer-

tainly be an acceptable reason."

"So are you sick, Alfie?" another Council member asked from the shadows.

Mr. Pettroggi turned in his swivel chair to face the questioner. "No, I ain't sick."

"Maybe you got a better offer somewhere else?" Arnie Boal purred.

"I don't work for nobody else in this line," Mr. Pettroggi snapped. "I quit this work, I quit all the way."

"You were supposed to knock off Red Schweitzer," Tony said. "We put you in charge of that job. To date, you ain't made no attempt to knock him off. Will you kindly explain to this Council why not?"

"That's part of it," Mr. Pettroggi said. "I am tired of knocking off guys. I request that someone else take over that job."

"We picked *you*, Alfie," Tony said. "Red Schweitzer is a very tough case. We wanted your special talent on this operation. We feel you are letting us down, Alfie."

Beads of sweat showed on Mr. Pettroggi's forehead under the strong light. He looked around at the waiting faces that he could see only dimly beyond the field of light. He stretched out his hand, palm up. "I ask you, understand me. I am thirty-nine years old, I

been with the Organization a long time. Up to now, no complaints, right? Now I see a vision; this life is wrong for me. For others, okay. For me, wrong. Me, I am inside an artist."

"Sure you are, Alfie," Tony said. "With a gun, hands, feet, anything, you're an artist. One of our best."

"I'm finding this ain't soul-satisfying," Mr. Pettroggi said earnestly. "This ain't creative. This ain't the philosophy of life I need. This ain't no heritage for my descendants." He struck his chest lightly with his clenched fist. "I got to create. I got to make things that are lasting and beautiful, which are monuments to my life, so people will say, 'He came this way.'"

A dapper man, leaning on the wall beyond the Council, said, "His spark plugs are loose."

"Shut up, Franky," Tony said. "Opinions ain't your job. You ain't Council, you're muscle, so shut up them opinions."

"Yeah, shut up, Franky," a lithe man standing near him said.

"You shut up too, Solly," Tony said. "All right, Alfie, so what do you want to make?"

"Violins," Mr. Pettroggi said.

There was a silence. Presently, Hapriano said, "Clarify that, please."

"I got a little shop at home,"

Mr. Pettroggi said. "Got it fixed up nice, best equipment I could buy. For years, I been making violins there, spare time. Now I figure I'm good enough to do it full time. I got a feel for it. To make a real fine violin, this is a true art. There ain't many masters in the field. Guarneri, Stradivari—"

"Ah, yes, Stradivari," Hapriano said.

"—Amati, Maggini, a few more. I got a dream one day there will be Pettroggi."

"This is a new one on me," Arnie Boal said. "What the hell kind of racket is that, making fiddles? Where's the percentage? You trying to kid us, Pettroggi?"

"I never been more serious," Mr. Pettroggi said. "The best violins got to be made by hands which they can feel the wood. There ain't no magic in a factory. You got to make it all sing together, like the angels; the waist, the bridge, the scroll, the tailpiece, the sound holes, the joints, even the varnish—"

"You think you can do this, Alfie?" Tony asked.

"I'm getting there."

"What's the money?"

"A couple grand apiece, maybe more, once I get it right and get the rep."

"Until then, how much?"

"A century or two."

"That stinks," Tony said. "Takes plenty time to make 'em, don't it? And how long to get the rep? Five years, ten years, maybe never? Sounds like straight to the poorhouse."

"I'll take the chance."

"Who makes out at this? Anybody?"

"Not many," Mr. Pettroggi admitted. "There's a guy in this city I heard of. Name's Johan Emmrech, an old Swiss. He ain't no Stradivari, but he got a good rep."

"Where's he live?"

"I never been there. He's in the phone book."

"Get the address, Franky," Tony ordered.

"I don't go for this," Boal said.

"Me, neither," another Council member muttered.

"It should at least be given fair consideration," Hapriano said.

Tony rose and walked out of the circle into the light. He took Mr. Pettroggi's shoulders and gave them a powerful shove. Mr. Pettroggi spun around in the swivel chair. The Council silently watched him whirling until the chair lost momentum and came to rest. Then Tony clenched Mr. Pettroggi's hair and jerked his head from side to side. He let go. "Maybe that will shake your brains back in place," Tony said, his deep voice making the liquor glasses on the

side buffet sing and tremble. "You got a high-paying profession, Alfie. You live good, fine house, summer place, Caddies and all. Ain't you got no responsibility to your family? Your wife, Sharon, is a fine woman. Does she deserve this? What's the matter you want to take away her security?"

"I got to make violins," Mr. Pettroggi said.

"Tell you what you need, Alfie," Tony said. "A little vacation. Hell, everybody gets stale. The routine does it."

"Routine can be deadly," Hapriano said.

"You just finish this one job, Alfie," Tony said. "Knock off Red Schweitzer, then we treat you and the family to a nice vacation. You come back refreshed, ready to go to work again. Will the Council agree to that?"

There were murmurs of assent.

"I ain't coming back to no more knocking off guys and no more leaning on people," Mr. Pettroggi said doggedly. "For me, this is wrong. I wish to make violins and I am asking this Council for permission to leave this connection without no hard feelings, hoping you will be big enough to understand."

A shutter seemed to fall over Tony's face. He stared at Mr. Pettroggi a long time.

"Clear enough," Hapriano said. "Kindly wait in the other room, Alfie. We will discuss your case."

Franky and Solly fell in behind Mr. Pettroggi as he went into the other room.

The discussion was a long one. Finally, the door opened. Tony came out, alone. His face was expressionless. "We had a tough time coming to a decision. It was me influenced them that a guy with your talent and record ought to get special attention. We decided you need one last lesson, and I'm the guy picked to give it to you. Let's go, boys, we're taking Alfie for a ride."

Mr. Pettroggi's face twitched.

"Easy there," Tony said. "There's all kinda rides . . ."

Franky drove, Solly next to him. Tony and Mr. Pettroggi were in back. The lights of the city went by as they drove in silence. They traversed busy thoroughfares, quieter residential streets, a park. They stopped in an outlying section of the city. Before them, under the wan moonlight, stretched a vast expanse full of thousands of brooding shapes of many sizes whose borders disappeared into the night.

"This is what, Alfie?" Tony said.

"A cemetery," Mr. Pettroggi said.

"Correct. The Elmwood Cemetery. A lot of people buried here. Hairy Kibble is buried here, for



one. You remember Hairy, Alfie?"

"Sure," Mr. Petroggi said. "I remember Hairy."

"Lefty Backus lies here, too. You remember Lefty?"

"I remember Lefty."

"Leo Faschetti is in there, too. You remember?"

"I remember him."

"Also, Mack the Truck Ryan?"

"Also."

"Johnny Tuscio?"

"Yeah."

"Okay. Who put those guys in the cemetery?"

"He did," Franky said.

"Shut up, Franky," Tony said.

"Who put those guys in here?"

"I did," Mr. Pettroggi verified. "That's right, you knocked 'em off, nobody else. Each one of those guys got a fine, expensive tomb, will last hundreds of years, maybe thousands. You want monuments? You want proof that you came this way? You want something to be proud of? *There's* your monuments."

"Some of them is really beautiful," Solly said.

"Shut up, Solly. Alfie, violins break, stone lasts. You can go on raising monuments. You already got a talent; why give it up for something you ain't sure about?"

"I got to make violins," Mr. Pettroggi said.

"Drive on, Franky," Tony said, "to where I told you."

Street lights again, bright storefronts, stoplights, the reds of tail-lights and the glare of oncoming beams, crowded avenues, quiet, subdued blocks, ranges of parkway, and they arrived at a respectable older neighborhood of modest, middle-class buildings. Franky parked.

"About like I figured," Tony said. "You know where we are, Alfie? You know whose address this is? Johan Emmrech's, the fiddle maker with the rep. There's his sign."

"I didn't realize," Mr. Pettroggi said.

"A lot you didn't realize, Alfie. Look how he lives. Look at the car in his driveway, not even a Caddy, two years old at least, must have cost under three grand brand-new. You would drive such a car? You would expect Sharon to be seen in a thing like that? Be fair, Alfie. Look at that house, plain brick all over, no picture windows, space for maybe six, seven lousy rooms the most, absolutely not for cathedral livingrooms and special poolrooms and two-level kitchens and ballroom bedrooms like you got now. Look at them grounds, maybe forty-five by a hundred, no fountain, no wrought-iron fencing. This is poverty, Alfie. This is the most you could expect from making fiddles. You want to live like this? In a slum?"

"I still got to make violins," Mr. Pettroggi said.

"Drive on, Franky."

They rolled through the city again, cross-town, through strings of traffic lights, along broad boulevards, to park in a street where impressive stone buildings shouldered each other down the row. Tony pointed down the street. "You know who lives down there, Alfie?"

"Yeah, I know this setup."

"Red Schweitzer, that's who. There's always some of his mob in that house protecting him. He don't go out much, and when he

does it's always in a bulletproof car with a bodyguard. To knock off this guy, Alfie, is going to take an artist. It's going to take brains. Guts. Talent. It's a challenge. And you want to make fiddles! You want a rep? You already got a rep. You want creative work? There's your work, Alfie."

"I got to make violins," Mr. Pettroggi said.

"Just give what I show you to-night some thought," Tony said. "We won't give the job to anybody else yet. Red will keep. Drive him home, Franky."

The weeks that followed were, at first, blissful to Mr. Pettroggi. No matter what Tony wanted, he was through with the Organization. Here was his work, in his shop, amid the sweet, tart smells of wood and glue and varnish, the familiar feel of his perfectly honed tools at home in his hands. Here was peace; no troubles. Just fine, sensitive woods to caress and join.

The past was past. Let be. No use thinking about it. Out of his mind. Everytime it tried to occupy him—out.

Sharon was not as willing to let things be. "Time is going and no money coming in, Alfie," she complained. "How long can we go on?"

"We still got some money."

"Sure, and it's shrinking fast. Where's the money the fiddles are supposed to bring in?"

"It'll come."

"I'm worried about the Organization, Alfie. I'm worried about you. Guys try to quit, mostly they get rubbed out."

"Tony understands."

"That Tony, he can smile at you one minute, kill you the next. You think you're safe, then a year later, maybe, you find yourself dead."

"It ain't like I'm joining some other mob."

It was an anxious moment when Mr. Pettroggi drew the first sounds from the violin he'd been working on. A bad moment too. The tone was disappointing. Good, but not what he'd hoped for.

The next one was maybe better—but also lacking. A quality was missing.

He worked long hours, with infinite pains, on another one. When he heard the tone, tears came to his eyes. No magic.

How long would it take to get it? How many years? It could be never. It could be that he just didn't have the spark he'd thought was in him.

He had to find out.

Mr. Emmrech's shop was at the side of his house, a close, dingy room, nothing like Mr. Pettroggi's own modern workplace, and thick

with the smells of pipesmoke and liniment. Emmrech was a scrawny, elderly man with doll-like blue eyes.

Mr. Pettroggi knew that with this craftsman there was little need for explanations, though they had never met. He took the violin he considered his best from its case and placed it on a workbench. "I made this," he said. "Tell me what you think, please."

Emmrech picked the violin up carefully. He ran his square fingers delicately over it, turning it this way and that. He grunted and reached for a bow. He adjusted the tuning and played an awkward little melody. He put the violin down. "Not too bad," he said.

"No more?"

"You want truth, no? There are many good instruments. Few great ones. This one is not too bad."

"What's my trouble?"

"Skill you have. Skill is not enough. It wants soul. An instrument gets its soul from its maker."

"You mean I ain't got soul?"

Emmrech's blue eyes fixed themselves on Mr. Pettroggi. "From you, I know nothing. From your instrument, I know something. There are flaws. There is a wrong strain, like you done wrong yourself."

"Yeah," Mr. Pettroggi said. "I done wrong things."

"Purity there is not. For how can

there be any purity with guilt?"

"Yeah, I been bad, bad, bad,"

Mr. Pettroggi agonized.

"A quality from uneasiness is there. To be uneasy with oneself is to want self-respect, to lack the serene conscience."

"Boy, have I got a conscience," Mr. Pettroggi groaned. "You shouldn't ever have my conscience."

"Excuse me, I must work now."

"Well, thank you," Mr. Pettroggi said. "Thank you very much."

Mr. Pettroggi drove a long time, thinking, but when he finally stopped the car he was not surprised to see where he was. Maybe it had always been inevitable that he should end up here.

Reaching down, he flipped a lever at the base of the seat and the section next to him swung up on its specially made hinges. From the secret compartment now revealed, he chose the equipment he wanted, including two .32 caliber automatics. He worked deftly, arranging two shoulder holsters and the other equipment about his person.

Leaving the car on the dim side street, he walked around the corner and up the wider street. Four doors away from Red Schweitzer's place, he turned in at the alley he'd checked out when he first got the order for this job; then quietly through the shadows to the dank

back yard, up the springy slats of the steel stairs, into the back hallway of the small apartment house. Quick, quiet, up the stairs—marble topped and grimy here—past the sleeping apartment doors, three flights and out on the roof.

Under his feet, tar now. Sharp air and the never-stopping city noises coming through the night like surf, like being alone on a beach. He padded silently over the tar, crossing roofs, sliding over the walls that separated the buildings. A gap between two of the buildings—okay, he'd known it was there. A simple jump over the black drop, landing on the hands and cartwheeling to safety, okay, it was done. One more roof, and here was Red's building.

Delicately, he tried the door on the roof. Bolted. Sure. Expected. He set the small plastic bomb on the door, stepped around the bay. *Boom*. He stepped back. The door was open and leaning. Down the stairs, extra fast. Necessary to go very fast now, like he was good at, like they said was one of his talents.

A guy on the top floor, gun out, going to shoot. *Bang*. Shot him first. Down the next flight of stairs and three of them coming up. A kick in the head that sent the top one flying back into the others, snap off a few more shots and

they were tumbling. Doors opening now; better use his Lecco 512 Blast the tear gas into each open door . . . Okay, and get away from this gas-filling floor.

Down the next flight of steps in two leaps and throw the grenade Sure, there'd been a mob of them ready to shoot. After the explosion, there they were sprawled all over the floor in the light from a room. Two couldn't have been hurt so bad because through the smoke they were sending bullets which naturally had trouble finding a target that wasn't there, but back up a couple steps. Then a real quick move, fire off a few slugs and the two were out like the rest.

Where was Red? Still in his room, wouldn't come out into this ruckus, not Red. This had to be the room, best room in the house, bay windows and all . . .

Crouching low, Mr. Pettroggi hit the door, hurtled into a dark void. Shots blasted from somewhere inside, but he was hard to hit, moving that fast. He'd thrown the door shut as he flashed by, so the weak light from the hallway wouldn't show him up. Silently, he wriggled to a side of the room. The shots had stopped.

Red was in here, somewhere. Couldn't see him. Had an idea what direction the shots had come from, but Red must have moved

by now. To fire would give his own location away.

Quiet. Listening for each other's breathing. Couldn't waste more time playing games in the dark. Shoot off his flashgun.

The room blazed in a shock of light, which instantly died. It had been enough. There was Red, gun in hand, paralyzed by the surprise flash, already starting to receive the shots pumped by instant reflexes. Up close now; yeah. Red done for.

To the window. Hanging full length from this second story sill, his feet less than a story from the pavement, he let himself drop. His feet were springs. Up unhurt, he raced for the corner, rounded it before the shots came from the windows. In minutes he was well away from the area in his car . . .

Mr. Pettroggi was working peacefully in his shop the following day. Under his hands, the beginnings of a new violin were taking form. Peace in his hands, peace in his soul. Maybe. This time, maybe.

Knocking at the door. "Come on in," Mr. Pettroggi called. Sharon was showing Tony and Franky and Solly in. "Hey," Mr. Pettroggi greeted.

"Hey," Tony said. He walked straight up to Mr. Pettroggi and

looked at him expressionlessly. Then he slowly and affectionately cuffed Mr. Pettroggi's head to one side. He cuffed it to the other. He took hold tightly of Mr. Pettroggi's arms and slid his hands up and down, kneading the flesh. "That's my boy," Tony said. "You knocked him off, and more with him. I ain't heard you took along any help, either."

"No help."

"Talent," Tony said. "Big talent. So now what, Alfie?"

"So now back with the Organization, if it's still okay. It was a mistake to quit."

"It sure was," Solly said.

"Shut up, Solly," Tony said. "Any time, Alfie. We want you. What about your fiddle-making?"

"Part-time. Maybe I can make it anyway."

"So you seen the light. I helped you?"

"Some. Mostly it was this old guy, Emmrech, helped me."

"How he helped you?"

"He made me realize I'd been doing bad things, I'd been doing wrong. He showed me I couldn't work true with a guilty conscience. No wonder I had a bad conscience, walking out on you guys, leaving my job undone."

"And now, Alfie?"

"Now my conscience is perfectly clear, Tony."

The familiarity that is said to breed contempt does, occasionally, engender a horse of a different color.



THE ANNEX

WITH his usual care, Richard Fletcher drove his car into the big double garage at the bottom of the garden. He walked down the paved path, admiring, as he invariably did, the colorful profusion of roses, still flourishing in mid-September. The front door of the cottage was closed, an unusual oc-

currence on a warm, sunny evening. The door led directly into the livingroom and, as soon as he stepped inside, he recognized trouble. Before the apprehensive silence was broken, he wondered if the cause was another heart attack. If so, it would be his mother's second and not likely to have left her sitting upright in her armchair, albeit with a strained, exhausted look that distressed and alarmed him.

"She's in the annex," she said flatly. "She's dead. I killed her."

"Marian?" Panic made his voice almost inaudible.

Beatrice Fletcher's grip on her

walking stick tightened and she hit the carpeted floor with it impatiently. "Of course not. Your wife's gone to Norwich for the day. Felt like having a look at the Cathedral." She made no attempt to conceal her perpetual disapproval of her daughter-in-law.

"Then who . . . ?" Richard was so relieved that, for a fleeting moment, the full significance of his mother's words evaded him. He groped. "Who's in the annex?"

"Your mistress—that little slut."

Richard glanced inquiringly at his sister. Was Mother now men-

tally ill? Edith's eyes, still surprisingly blue in spite of her forty-three years, stared back at him expressionlessly. Her face was pale, but then it always was. She half-turned away from him with a gesture of contempt.

"Mother, I have no mistress. What are you talking about?" His eyes searched the tired, obstinate face.

Edith crossed to the armchair and stood behind it protectively. "Mother meant what she said. The girl's name was Angela Brown. She was pregnant with your child



and she said you'd have to marry her."

Richard studied their serious, tense faces, then walked out of the cottage and along the few yards of pebbled path to the wooden annex. Hesitantly, he opened the creaking door. The chintz curtains were drawn across the small window and, after the day's hot sunshine, the room was stifling. Bracing himself, he crossed to the bed and looked down on the fully-clothed body of a young girl. Her pallid face, framed by short, dark hair, appeared quite peaceful. Her eyes were closed.

"Mother did it with a pillow." Edith, standing in the open doorway behind him, was watching him carefully.

"Mother's sixty-six and that girl's barely in her twenties," he said, quietly. "She just let a frail invalid asphyxiate her—without a struggle?"

Edith shook her head. "Mother offered her tea, but she asked if she could have a drink, she felt so weak. She'd been traveling all morning, and what with the baby . . . Mother gave her a large gin, with orange—to mask the sleeping pills she dissolved in it," she added, slowly. "So there was no struggle."

"If you'd got a doctor right away—" Richard began.

"I didn't dare. He'd have had to send for the police if he couldn't save her." Her words came jerkily. "It happened about three o'clock this afternoon. I was out shopping."

He had seen the girl for himself, but he still didn't believe a word of the weird story. There were too many unanswered questions. "What was Mother doing downstairs at three o'clock?" he demanded sharply. "It's her time for resting."

"I left her propped up in the armchair at her bedroom window, as usual," Edith replied, quietly. "You know she can see the garden, and people passing on their way to and from the beach. That's why she likes it here, she knows so many of them and she waves to them and they to her—"

"Yes, yes, I know all that," Richard broke in impatiently.

Edith ignored the interruption. "The girl came through the garden gate and rang the front doorbell. Mother called to her from the window. The girl said she was looking for you. She seemed so distressed, and yet determined, that Mother decided she'd better talk to her. She asked the girl to come up to her room and help her cope with the stairs." Edith lowered her eyes. "By the time I got back at four o'clock, it was all over." She took a deep breath. "I must say, Richard, it was pretty unnerving."

Mother was in her chair in the livingroom, looking strained but otherwise no different. She was quite calm when she told me what had happened."

"And Marian?" Richard asked, apprehensively.

"Oh, she suddenly decided after breakfast to go off for the day. Nothing unusual about that," she said drily.

No, indeed, he thought. Marian made her escape from Edith whenever she could. "So she knows nothing of this . . . this charade."

Edith shook her head. "It's no joking matter," she said, bitterly.

"I grant you that. It's also a lot of phony nonsense. I suppose we'll have to leave it to the police to unsort the tangle."

Edith's blue eyes were wary. "The police? So what happens to Mother?"

"She'll have to give up this ridiculous story about having killed the girl. Then perhaps we'll get at the truth."

"She won't go back on her story. Why should she? It couldn't have happened any other way. I can vouch for that."

"Whatever way it happened, it's a bloody marvel she's survived the strain, with her heart in the condition it is."

"Sheer tenacity," Edith murmured. "She'll hang on until this

thing is settled, then she'll let go gladly. She's said over and over again to me that she's ready to go."

Richard doubted that. The doctor had told him his mother could live for several years with reasonable care. It was more like a bit of Edith's wishful thinking. They all knew she was to inherit this seaside cottage.

Edith and her husband, Gregory, and their two boys, Jeremy and Frank, always spent part of their school vacations here. Richard and Marian and their three children, two girls and a boy, joined them for the same period. Hence the need for the annex in the garden, used by two of the boys as a bedroom. The cottage, ideally situated away from the busy main thoroughfare, had a large garden with enough grassy lawn for the youngsters, and the beach was only five minutes' walk. When Edith inherited, these family gatherings would end. There was no love lost between Richard and Edith, who was two years older than he and resented his assumption of seniority in family matters. He had little in common with Gregory, his brother-in-law, who lived in Edith's shadow when he wasn't abroad, as he was now, on one of his frequent lecture tours. Marian and Edith constantly got on each other's

nerves. Only Beatrice Fletcher had kept the family together, but even she'd had to yield to the children's demands to be allowed to spend a couple of weeks of the long summer vacation with their own friends.

"I—I suppose you must tell the police?" Edith murmured.

"For heaven's sake!" Richard exclaimed. "How do you suggest we get rid of the body?"

"Well, we've only to get through this weekend, then it's back to town. We haven't used the annex since the children left five days ago. If the girl is found later on, it would look as if some outsider had been making use of the annex—nothing to do with us. Anyone could break in or even find a key to fit. We wouldn't have to explain it, just insist we knew nothing about it."

He eyed her speculatively. "You really think that would work?"

She sighed. "It's worth a try, after all, if it would save Mother. We've got to think of her."

"You think she'd agree to that version? Have you discussed it with her?"

"No, not yet, but she might if you suggested it. You're her darling son," she added spitefully.

They both heard Marian driving her car into the garage at the same instant, and they turned and waited

for her to come down the garden toward the cottage. Tall and dark, and dressed as usual in strong, gay colors that set off her black hair and gray eyes and clear complexion, she caught sight of them and waved, but her step lost its spring as she drew closer to them.

Thank God she wasn't the helpless, clinging type, Richard thought. He didn't relish telling her what had happened, but at least he wouldn't have to wrap it up and pretend it was less of a catastrophe than it really was.

"What's wrong, what's the matter?" Marian asked sharply.

Edith began to walk away. "I'll leave you two together," she said. "And I'll get Mother upstairs to bed if I can."

Blocking the entrance to the annex, Richard told his wife what had happened.

"The tigress, protecting her young," Marian murmured.

"You believe Mother's story then?"

"It's in character for her to do such a thing," she said resignedly.

He looked at her curiously. "And it's in character for me to get a young girl pregnant?" he queried.

"I didn't say that," Marian replied, too quickly.

There was a short silence. The lost, unhappy look in her eyes angered him.

"There's a dead girl in there, but I admit I'm more concerned about our relationship at the moment than her violent end. Before we go any further, before I talk to Mother and the police, and try to make some sort of sense of all this, I mean to get things straight between you and me. Now, Marian . . ." She took a step toward him, making a gesture of reconciliation, but he stepped back. "No, not yet. Problems aren't solved on a wave of emotion. Have you been deceiving you with that young girl in there?"

Marian licked her lips. "Don't be so self-righteous, Richard," she said, shakily. "I don't want to believe it, of course." She regained some of her composure and spoke in her natural voice. "But people really are unpredictable, aren't they? We've said so, many times, when we've been discussing others." She smiled a little. "Always other people, of course. But, really, Richard, why not you?"

"Or you?" he asked quietly.

Her smile widened. "You'll have to take my word for it, my dear. I haven't got a lover."

He felt able to smile too. "Nor have I, nor have I had, since we've been married."

Tension eased. The dangerous moment had passed.

Marian insisted on looking at

the girl. "Are you sure she's dead?" She peered closely at the inert face. "I've never actually seen a dead body," she murmured.

Richard frowned. "I saw my father, or at least his face, but only for a few moments; you know how it is."

"Yes." Marian's hand hovered over the girl's forehead, then she touched it tentatively. "She's so . . . so still. One feels for a pulse, I think."

Richard watched with mixed feelings as she fumbled with the girl's wrist. Marian shook her head. "I can't feel anything." Her voice was strained. "Richard, would you . . . could you listen . . . for a heartbeat?"

He gestured her aside, leaned over the motionless body, and let his ear rest on the girl's chest. "It's hopeless." He straightened. "She's been like this for nearly four hours," he pointed out.

"Your mother must know, Richard. After all, she was a qualified nurse." She giggled. "Something nasty in the woodshed . . ."

He was saved from facing up to the implications of his mother's medical knowledge by the unexpected crack in Marian's self-control.

"Stop it, Marian," he snapped.

She took a deep breath. "I'm all right, really." Richard released her

and she stepped back, frowning, puzzled. "I've seen her, somewhere. Richard, I know her face." Her voice trailed off. "But I can't place her."

Richard's momentary surprise gave way to indifference. "We know her name. There's no mystery."

"If only I could remember. It's so silly," Marian muttered, "but it keeps happening, doesn't it? One sees a face that's somehow familiar . . ."

"We'd better go back to the cottage," Richard said, leading the way. As they entered, they heard Edith's firm footsteps coming down the steep, narrow staircase. Her pale face looked gray in the evening sunlight that filtered through the livingroom window.

"How's Mother?" Richard demanded.

She shook her head. "Poorly. We'll have to fix up a bed in here. Those stairs are impossible for her."

"But she's always refused to turn this room into a bedroom," Marian protested.

Richard sighed. Usually decisive, quick to react, not easily sidetracked, he was at a loss to know how to deal with the incredible situation. His lawyer's mind tried to examine detachedly what at the moment passed for evidence, but

emotional involvement kept getting in the way. He disliked and distrusted his sister. On the other hand, as he was devoted to his mother, he could not bring himself to accept her version of the girl's violent death. The obvious thing to do was to call the police, and then no longer he delayed the more risk it would be.

"I'm going up to talk to Mother," he said abruptly.

Beatrice Fletcher lay propped up on her pillows, her white, exhausted face slack and still. She opened her faded eyes and smiled at him with a faint, forced smile which she couldn't maintain.

He pulled up a chair and took her chill, dry hand in his. "How do you feel?" he asked softly.

"Weak," she said. "I don't want to talk, Richard."

She was very ill, he acknowledged, but she was putting off some of this helplessness, he felt sure. She had borne her illness indomitably but she had also used with remarkable skill to continue to get her own way whenever the occasion had arisen. Richard was aware of this and rather admired her for it. She tightened her thin lips and sunk her chin into her chest.

"That girl wasn't my mistress but even if she claimed to be, I can't believe you killed her—just

or that. Why did you?" he asked. "Not for you, nor for Marian, but for the children. Someone had to think of them." Her voice was weak but the words came clearly enough.

"But a murder trial—where everything is bound to come out—that's not much protection for the children."

A faint smile softened the haggard face and she opened her eyes, resting them on her son's worried face. "There will be no trial, no publicity. Call the police, Richard, now. I want to make a statement." She sighed. "Then I can let go. I'm tired, so tired."

He still didn't believe her but the police probably would. They didn't know his mother like he did, they would accept her motive. That meant his character being blackened, and perhaps gossip would leak out, not at all a nice prospect. Suddenly he realized she was staring at him intently.

"Don't worry, Richard, about your own image. You don't live here, your home's far away. It doesn't matter about local gossip. And you won't come back here when I'm gone."

"Mother, I can't let you do this for Edith."

Her eyes flickered angrily. "Edith . . . Edith's vulnerable . . . a mother . . . Gregory's useless."

She broke off. "How did you know?"

"I couldn't see you killing anyone in cold blood. It had to be Edith."

He couldn't understand her reaction—a bitter smile, a sigh of impatience. "You're wrong, Richard. I could and I did."

He bent down and brushed her forehead with his lips. "Have it your own way, Mother," he said quietly, and was rewarded with the look of relief that crossed her face.

In the livingroom, Edith and Marian waited for him, each preoccupied with her own thoughts.

"I can't shake her story," he said, "and I'm sure the police won't."

"Why should you, or they, want to?" Edith asked sharply. "Why should she take the blame if she hadn't done it?"

He looked at her speculatively. "I'm just as curious as the police are going to be, Edith, as to how Mother got the girl into the annex."

"After they'd talked for a little while in here, Mother asked her to wait in the annex as the cottage was like a hotel, with people dropping in all the time," Edith explained patiently. "Then Mother took the drink to her in the annex. The girl grumbled about feeling tired, so Mother told her to stretch out on the bed—" She broke off,

and there was a long, brittle silence.

The conversation he'd just had with his mother nagged at Richard's mind. For a moment they had been talking at cross-purposes. She'd thought his reference to Edith had been about something else.

"Why didn't you call the doctor?" he asked, returning to the attack.

"I told you, I didn't dare." She half-turned away, avoiding his eyes. "Anyway, Mother insisted on no doctor, and one doesn't defy her, Richard, in the state she's in." She faced them again, suddenly angry. "You think I killed that girl, don't you, both of you?"

"Listen, Edith," Richard said quietly, "as I am the only one who knows with absolute certainty that the dead girl was not my mistress, I find Mother's motive utterly bewildering."

"That was what the girl told her," Edith replied irritably. "I can understand your denying it but, all the same, it's what Mother believed. Look, Richard, Mother's no fool and there's nothing wrong with her mind. All the circumstantial details of her story will be checked: the time of the girl's arrival—somebody's sure to have seen her—and my shopping alibi. When they've established the time of death, they'll know I couldn't

have done it." She spoke defiantly but confidently.

"You don't believe me when I tell you the girl was not my mistress?"

She lowered her eyes. "You don't believe me when I tell you I didn't kill her." Her lips trembled. "After all, murder is somewhat worse than . . . than infidelity." She crossed quickly to the stair case. "I'm going up to sit with Mother for a while."

Richard threw up his hands in despair and turned to Marian. "What a mess, what a bloody mess," he muttered. "I can't bring myself to telephone the police. I just don't believe Mother callously murdered that young girl."

"I believe it, Richard," Marian said calmly, "because I'm not emotionally involved, as you are."

His eyes clouded. "You know I've never been sloppy about Mother," he protested. "I've always acknowledged her faults."

"Yes, yes," she said impatiently. "Little human weaknesses, like we all have. Small deceptions to get her own way, that sort of thing. But to me, she's a ruthless, self-righteous woman."

He thought this over for a few moments. "But you can't be sure. There's Edith—"

"You dislike Edith," Marian said quietly.

"I take your point. All the same, Marian—" His mouth tightened into the familiar, obstinate Fletcher line. "Mother's not capable of deliberate murder."

There was no sense in arguing, Marian knew. She spoke placatingly. "When the police come, you mustn't dispute your mother's motive, otherwise the whole thing collapses. There will be too much investigation and heaven knows where that will lead to."

Richard eyed her warily. "You mean you want me to admit this girl was my mistress even though you don't believe it yourself?"

Marian nodded. "After your mother's given the police her statement, she might tell us the truth."

"Yes, you're right, she probably will." His hand hovered over the telephone.

"Richard, wait a minute." Marian's voice sounded urgent. "You're tired, and Edith's had a terrible day. Leave it till the morning."

"But the longer we delay—" he began.

"We can fix the time of your mother's confession to us to suit ourselves."

"True . . ." He needed no more persuasion. "And I'd like to be thinking clearly. I'll have to provide some convincing background, I suppose, to my love life with this girl. I'm sure Edith and Mother

will see the advantage of leaving it till morning."

That night, he tossed fitfully and restlessly for over two hours. Eventually, a double dose of sleeping pills took effect and he dropped off into an exhausted sleep.

Marian had forced herself to stay awake, waiting for this moment. She wrapped herself in a warm dressing gown and went quietly downstairs. The familiarity of the girl's face had kept nagging at her mind. Vaguely, irrationally, she felt that if she could only identify her, it would somehow help them out of their impasse. She didn't examine the idea too closely. She just felt she must have another look at the girl, in the undisturbed quiet of the night. It was a spooky thing to do, she acknowledged to herself, but she'd just have to face it.

She'd had to hide her intention from Richard. He wouldn't have tried to prevent her but he'd have insisted on accompanying her, distracting her, when she needed all the concentration she could muster. By the light of the torch she made her way cautiously across the moonless garden to the annex. She hesitated, her hand on the latch, swallowed her revulsion, and opened the door slowly. The slight creak sounded in her ears like a pistol shot and she held her breath;

then she realized nobody in the house could possibly have heard it.

She masked the strong light from the torch with her hand, moved toward the bed, the girl's figure in outline coming into view as she drew nearer. Then she froze. For a moment, sheer terror took over.

The girl was now lying half on her side, her legs curled up slightly. *Someone had moved her*, Marian thought wildly, *but why!* She forced herself to hold the torchlight on the girl's face. It was still pale but no longer stark. The girl was alive. With her knees almost turning to water and her whole body trembling with shock and, above all, relief, Marian sat down on the chair by the bedside and let her tears flow.

The girl stirred and opened her eyes with difficulty. To Marian she looked more familiar than ever, the large, lovely dark eyes, at the moment misted by drowsiness or whatever it was that had brought her so close to death. She blinked two or three times, then won the struggle for wakefulness. It took some effort to get out the words: "I feel bloody awful."

Marian dabbed her face and hoped the tears wouldn't show, then switched on the bedside lamp. The girl quickly closed her eyes as if unable to bear the sudden light.

"Oh, I'm sorry—" Marian began.

"Leave it, I'll get used to it," but she kept her eyes shut. "My mouth—I feel as if I've been chewing gravel."

The well-spoken, modulated voice surprised Marian. Without spelling it out to herself, she had felt that the girl must be a pathetic, deprived member of the lower classes. Perhaps her clothes had given that impression. They were of the fashionable sort worn by the young nowadays, cheap and flamboyant. Her hands, however, were immaculate, with over-manicured nails. She drew herself up onto one elbow, opened her eyes, and stared at Marian. "What time is it?" she asked.

"It's nearly four o'clock . . . in the morning."

The girl blinked. "In the morning," she repeated, her voice almost drying up.

Marian poured her a glass of water from the carafe. She sipped it slowly at first, then drained the glass. A little color returned to her face and the glazed look in her eyes faded a little. "Do you mean to say I've slept here since . . . since about three o'clock this . . . no, yesterday afternoon?" She frowned. "There's been some funny business. That old girl was a bit too good to be true." Suspicion and hostility took over. "And who are you? And what are you doing, sitting

my bedside at this hour?" She looked appraisingly at Marian. "I'm strictly heterosexual." She patted her abdomen. "Is Jeremy around?"

Jeremy! Jeremy's interest in the television studios near his school was as a family joke. The elusive arguments crystallized in Marian's mind. She had seen Angela Brown on television, in very small dramatic parts.

"Jeremy's camping in France with some other boys until he goes back to college in a few weeks," Marian replied carefully.

"Oh, yes, I know all that. But I thought I'd catch him before he left." She pushed herself up, leaned her head for a moment against the pillows, then sat up, her strength increasing with each moment that passed. A pillow lying at the foot of the bed caught her eye and she studied it with a puzzled frown. "I don't remember that being there . . ." She paused. "But there's something, I can't quite . . ." She sighed. "Oh well, I daresay it will all come back when I've had some nourishment."

The soft, fuzzy expression had cleared, revealing a hard and wary pair of eyes.

"Do you feel well enough to come across to the house?" Marian asked stiffly.

"I bloody well do, I'm ravenous.

And if Jeremy's not here, someone's got to listen to me."

She was a little unsteady on her feet and was glad of Marian's helping arm. *So, it was Jeremy*, Marian thought, as they crossed the garden with the help of the torch; *Jeremy and not Richard*. She had believed Richard, of course, but it was bliss to have it confirmed.

She hurriedly made some ham sandwiches and a large pot of strong, black coffee, and while Angela was eating and drinking, she went upstairs, shook Richard out of his drugged sleep with a hurried explanation. There was no need to waken Edith. She appeared on the landing, demanding to know what was going on.

They joined the girl in the livingroom. Edith stared at her as if hypnotized. Angela stared back.

"You're Jeremy's mother," she said. "He's shown me snaps. He's a bit like you—those blue, blue eyes . . ." She shrugged. "I'm Angela Brown." She eyed Richard appreciatively. "Uncle Richard, I presume?"

He turned and looked helplessly at Marian. "Where do we begin?" he asked.

Edith's voice was hard. "She came here to browbeat Jeremy into marriage, to ruin his life . . ."

Angela's laugh came spontaneously. "You must be joking! Jer-

emy's been doing the browbeating. I just want to get rid of this." She patted her abdomen again. "I don't want to marry him. I thought I'd catch him before he left for France."

"You're lying! You must be," Edith said, "or why did my mother . . ." She let the words hang in the air. There was a moment's brittle silence. Angela looked from one to the other, pursing her expressive mouth. Nobody completed Edith's question.

"Look, this is getting boring," the girl said. "I told the old lady I'd come to ask Jeremy to marry me because I thought that was the best way to handle her. She was very calm and reasonable, so I thought the best way to play it was in the role of the ingenue—bewildered, seduced by her darling grandson—looking for help from her beloved's family. I hadn't really rehearsed it that way but when I realized Jeremy wasn't here, I decided to start off on the innocent maiden role and play it by ear after that."

"You didn't fool her," Richard said, quietly. "She called you a slut."

"Pooh! Words like that . . ." She snapped her fingers.

Richard poured himself a cup of black coffee and sipped it quickly, in the hope that it would clear his mind and help him shake off his

hangover from the sleeping pill. Barbiturates always left him thick-headed. He turned away from the girl and spoke directly to Edith. "Mother must be told," he said.

"When she wakens naturally," Edith said. "Not before." She made a gesture of distaste toward Angela. "And certainly not until we've got rid of her." She spoke directly to the girl. "I'll give you four hundred dollars for your abortion," she said.

"Six hundred," Angela replied promptly. "I'll need a bit of a holiday after it."

"How can I be sure you'll leave Jeremy alone?"

Angela made a rude gesture. "If you believe I'm after your darling boy," she said contemptuously, "you'll believe anything. I've got a big career ahead of me. I'm a good actress and I'm going to be a great one. I don't want anything else. I left home because my parents opposed my going to drama school. They wanted me to go to college. So I simply walked out on them and took the first bit part I could get. I've got to fight my way up in that rat race with what talents I've got, understand? Marriage to Jeremy would be the end." She emphasized her words with an admonishing finger waved at Edith. "You ought to know your own son. He's a gooey romantic. Wants

to marry me, wants me to have the baby, wants me to live in an apartment with him while he finishes school. She drained her coffee cup. "He's nothing but a bore, I tell you," she said mildly. "A dreary bore."

Edith was shaking with humiliation, humiliation that this detestable girl could reject her son. "You're sure the baby's Jeremy's?" she demanded.

Angela whirled on her. "No! I'm not sure. Do you want to make something of that?"

For a moment it looked as if Edith would strike her. Her face was flushed and her blue eyes blazed with anger.

"You're lucky to be alive, you cheap little tart," she cried. "My mother doped your drink with sleeping pills and when you were unconscious, she stuffed a pillow over your mouth, to finish you off. She thinks she killed you! We thought she'd killed you!"

Recollection dawned slowly on Angela's face. "I was nearly out, but not quite. I held my breath. She was feeble, really, that's what I

remember thinking." Her large, dark eyes widened in horror. "I must have hung on by a thread . . ." She looked around the room at each of them in turn, her contempt almost tangible. "That's great, just great, sitting in moral judgment of me because you don't like my sex life. And that old trout! I'll tell her a thing or two." She dashed across the room and up the staircase.

There was a paralyzed silence. Richard faced his moment of truth with bitter resentment. He'd better try to stop the confrontation, he decided, but when he reached the landing, Angela was already at his mother's door. He stood quite still and watched her as she pushed it open. The dawn light was filtering through the curtains and the girl stood, framed in the open doorway, like an avenging angel.

"Ghost . . ." He heard his mother's breaking voice choke on the word.

Unhurriedly, he crossed to the bedside. This time he knew with certainty, and with relief, that he was looking at death.



Basic traits are likely most helpful to one's analyst—if they are utilized.



DESTROYED Engineer

RON CORMER had settled into his plush seat for a pleasant two-hour trip in surroundings that suited his taste. Outside, the sky was a sparkling cloudless blue, and the jet engines hummed smoothly on the slim silver wing. Inside, as viewed from his aisle position, the movements of the sleek blonde hostess in her very minimal skirt were an absorbing sight. As a final frosting on his cake of delight, there was another young and attractive blonde sitting next to him, looking as if she might be amenable at least to conversation. This he proposed to strike up after a respectable pause.

Then it was all spoiled, because

then he found the note from Beth.

He had sat down with his attache case on his knees, as he often began a flight, to assure everyone that he was a serious, conscientious businessman on a business trip. The gesture was intended to assure himself also, especially when business was being combined with pleasure—*forbidden pleasure.*

This time, when he opened the case as a mere formality, the note almost jumped up in his face, a single sheet of Beth's lime-green stationery bearing a few lines penned in brown ink. Seeing Beth's

rather painful, contorted handwriting, even before he read it, annoyed him. Everything about her annoyed him. He had imagined he had escaped her for a couple of days, and here she was, pursuing him.

I know where you're going, Ron dear. He read the note without touching it. I know about Candace Devereaux. I know about everything. Let this be your last thought of me, I'm not as stupid as you always presume I am. Happy landing!

Quite suddenly he felt more than annoyance. He felt a chill. Whatever it was, it was some kind of cold feeling. In the beginning, in

those first few moments of reaction, he didn't identify the feeling as fear.

How in the devil . . . ? He closed the case abruptly, as if shutting out the sight of the note would cause it to cease to exist. How the devil had she found out about Candace? He'd been discreet, in his well-practiced way. She'd found him out on several previous occasions but, on the other hand, he'd fooled her a few times too. Where had he slipped up this time?

Did it matter? Yes, it did, because he ought to learn from his mistakes. He ought to know where he'd made this mistake for future

by C. B. Gilford



reference . . . He closed his eyes.

Future . . . the word echoed oddly, silently, in his brain. Then he caught himself. Had he been thinking that Beth's discovery of this present infidelity somehow altered the future? How could it? He had successfully explained, apologized, and promised before. *Let this be your last thought of me . . .*

He shivered. Was Beth demented? No, Beth was the solid, sensible sort. She wasn't planning anything desperate . . . like a divorce . . . or . . . well, of course, not anything really desperate. No, what she was doing in her inimitable nasty little way was trying to spoil his trip.

Damn! She had already somewhat succeeded in that, hadn't she? Instead of enjoying his little fling with Candace for the next two or three evenings, he'd be thinking up some story to tell Beth. He'd be distracted, to say the least.

Getting a grip on himself, he cast a sideways glance toward the girl in the window seat. He would not let Beth spoil this plane ride! The girl was gazing out at the sky. He liked the blonde hair, and the subtle perfume. His eyes traveled down to her knees. Very good, he decided.

She probably wasn't the kind who could be picked up on a short

flight, but he wouldn't mind talking to her. He liked attractive women. Was there anything to be ashamed of in that? He liked looking at them, talking to them, making love to them if the opportunity offered.

Even if the encounter never went beyond the talking stage, he usually enjoyed himself. He talked about himself—an enjoyable subject—and women invariably found him and his business impressive.

"Well, I started out as a chemist," he always got around to saying during these conversations.

"That must be interesting work," the girl might remark. Good-looking women usually responded to intelligence in men.

"Oh no, it was dull," he would inform her. "Chemistry is drudgery. But it gave me the necessary scientific background. Right now I'm in sales. Roving consultant, you might say. I give advice on what and how much to use to get the job done."

The eyebrows would rise on the pretty face. "Get what job done?" was the inevitable question.

"The job of blowing up whatever needs to be blown up," he would answer with a smile. "You've heard of construction engineers? Well, I'm a *destruction* engineer. My company deals in, among other things, explosives . . ."

Explosives! For some unknown reason, the shiver ran through him again. He jerked up the lid of the attache case. *Happy landing!* Beth's note said to him.

Impossible, he told himself. Yes, it was impossible, ridiculous, preposterous, fantastic, utterly . . . utterly . . . impossible! Yet now and then, once a year or every two years, it happened. Somebody blew up an airplane!

The cute blonde next to him was leaning forward and staring at him. What was he doing? Was he shivering so visibly that she noticed?

He didn't turn to her suavely and say, "Well, I started out as a chemist." Instead he lurched to his feet, plopped the attache case on the seat, and staggered into the aisle. He reached the washroom, found it vacant, went inside, and splashed water on his face. He didn't get sick, although he thought for a moment he was going to.

He stayed there for quite a while, leaning on the bowl, trying for a little calm, a little control, of both stomach and brain.

What was he going to do? Send a message up to the pilot telling him there might be a bomb on this plane? No . . . no, he wasn't sure of that. But there might be! Why take the chance? Tell the pilot to land as quickly as possible!

Wait . . . maybe that was just what Beth wanted him to do—embarrass him, and then laugh at him later. Beth hadn't had many chances for revenge in the past. She'd never had an affair, at least not that he'd known of. She wasn't the type for that. Yet there had always been a certain subtlety, deviousness in her, traits which had interested him originally. What, then, was she up to now?

If she merely wanted to blow him and the airplane out of the sky, like swatting an insect with a sledgehammer, why had she written the note? Why warn him, give him a chance to escape?

No, the note was subtle, oblique, teasing. Did she want him to wonder what it meant? To sweat? Yes, she would enjoy his sweating, two hours of it.

It wasn't just a simple matter of asking the pilot to land. He'd have to give reasons. Either show the note or explain. The pilot would land. Airline pilots don't take chances. There'd be publicity. Boy, would there be publicity! Ron Cormer, traveling salesman and consultant for Martindale, caught by his wife in a little extracurricular activity, receives subtly threatening note and airliner is forced to return to city . . . or land in a pasture. Besides, the note wasn't really a threat. Ron Cormer, old Martindale

would demand, playing around on company time and subjecting the company to all this unfavorable publicity?

Maybe that was precisely what Beth wanted him to do: first to sweat, and then to appear before the whole world as a fool.

He was more angry than afraid when he left the washroom and walked back to his seat. The cute blonde flashed him a glance of concern as he arrived.

Well, he could forget about having a pleasant conversation with her, he thought bitterly as he removed the attache case and occupied the seat himself. She probably thought he'd gotten airsick, poor old man. Maybe she was relieved that he'd made it to the washroom instead of doing it right there beside her.

Anyway, he had to think, think hard, sort everything out. He opened the case, read the note through again quickly, again without touching it.

Let this be your last thought of me . . . Happy landing! He shut the case, but the words were written indelibly in his mind. Was Beth capable of murder?

He tried to remember the other times. The first time she'd been shocked, hurt, then distant and cold with him for maybe six months. The second time had been

amazement, disbelief in his remorse and promises. She just couldn't understand him, she'd said; but later on, after several other girls, perhaps she had come to understand. It was all a little hazy in his mind. He could remember the names of all the girls, but couldn't place them in proper sequence. Beth had talked of separation and divorce now and then, but never had she even mentioned violence. She had seemed . . . well . . . resigned. He had learned to be discreet, but Beth probably had guessed that he hadn't changed. Maybe she had decided to pretend, as long as she didn't know for sure to the contrary, that her husband was being faithful. So when Candace Devereaux had come along, he hadn't thought twice about Beth's finding out or how she would react if she did find out.

Perhaps, he thought now, she'd been keeping good track of him all the time, and for some reason she'd chosen this occasion to become concerned, jealous, bitter, and to go to the trouble of slipping a note into his attache case.

She knew he carried the case with him on the plane. She knew he'd find the note and read it, not after landing, but while still in the air. Yes, she wanted him to sweat, all right.

But what else did she want?

Think! Think it through! Think!

Would Beth know how to construct a bomb? She'd been a chemistry major in college, hadn't she? Theirs had been one of those graduate-school marriages, and Beth had worked in a lab for two years. Not on explosives, but she certainly would know the ingredients of a little bomb. The mechanics were simple enough.

Yet she'd acted so calmly and matter-of-factly there at the airport. It wasn't often that they went on trips at the same time. "I think I'll go to see Jenny while you're gone," she'd said, and so she'd been boarding an eastbound plane while he'd been boarding a westbound.

Was it really her sister Jenny she was going to visit? Nonsense . . . of course it was. When would Beth have had a chance to find an out-of-town lover?

"How about flight insurance?" he had asked her in the airport terminal.

"You won't have any trouble replacing me, dear," was all she had said; a bitter, cynical little remark.

If she had been planning to murder him, wouldn't she have urged him to buy flight insurance? Lots of it? No . . . no . . . maybe not. Remember, pal, old Beth is no dummy. A bundle of insurance on his life, in case of a mid-air explosion, would point a finger of sus-

picion at her. No, if she were trying to murder him, it was for revenge, not for profit.

Suddenly he remembered about the luggage. Had she been more than normally concerned about whose suitcase was whose?

"I don't want to arrive at Jenny's with your extra suits and shirts," she had said. They'd bought their tickets at the same counter, from the same airline, and Beth had lingered a moment to make absolutely sure that the clerk tagged each suitcase correctly.

Yet hadn't that been rather a normal concern on Beth's part? The suitcases were similar. Beth didn't travel much, had no luggage of her own, and had appropriated his older bag while he took the newer one. Since Beth's suitcase wasn't feminine, and the clerk could have confused them, she had double-checked.

Wait a minute. Had Beth had a chance to slip a bomb into his suitcase? He tried to recall the details of their departure from the apartment. He had packed his own suitcase, he was certain of that. In the early, romantic days of their marriage, Beth had performed that little chore lovingly, but when she had discovered that she might be packing him for a rendezvous, she had let him shift for himself.

His bag had been left in the bed-

room for maybe half an hour before they'd started for the airport. Of course she'd had the chance; he had been on the telephone several times. She would have had to risk his opening the bag again at the last minute, but he hadn't opened it.

So he was back where he had started from. Beth had the knowledge, the opportunity, the motivation for murdering him. What he doubted was whether she had the temperament for it. Was revenge worth all that?

Because when a plane blows up in the air, every name on the passenger list is exhaustively investigated. It would come out that Ron Cormer worked for Martindale Chemical, which dealt in explosives. Some coincidence, eh? Then it would come out that Beth Cormer had a graduate degree in chemistry, and had probably listened to her husband's shop talk. It would become a matter of tracing the materials used in the bomb. Had Mrs. Cormer had access to such materials? What had she purchased? Where? When? Those things can be tracked down.

Beth had too much sense to pull a stunt like this!

He almost leaped out of the seat when that thought popped into his mind. Of course! If Beth wanted to murder him—and he didn't dismiss that possibility—she would

choose a less spectacular, and therefore a less dangerous, method. He'd bet on that!

He'd bet his life on it, in fact.

He glanced at the blonde next to him. This time she met his eyes. He smiled, and she gave him a smile in return.

"Are you all right now?" she asked.

"Sure . . ."

"You're perspiring."

"Am I?" He pulled out a handkerchief and wiped his brow. "Yes, I was perspiring, wasn't I?"

"Does the plane . . . ?"

"The plane? Oh no, I ride planes all the time. But I often perspire when I'm thinking very hard. I guess I must have been concentrating a little too much."

She was interested. "Business problems, I suppose."

"Right."

"What kind of business are you in that requires such concentration?"

"Explosives."

Her eyes widened. "Oh my!"

He settled down to the conversation. There wasn't any bomb. If there were, by this time the quickest way to get down on the ground was to go on through to destination. The blonde was cute and impressionable. No rings on her finger. She might be willing to go out with him. Of course, Candace

was waiting for him. Too bad. Feast or famine.

"You've heard of construction engineers," he said. "Well, I'm a destruction engineer . . ."

He said good-bye to the little blonde, Toni, at the terminal because Candace was there to meet him, but he had the satisfaction of seeing Toni's disappointment at the sight of Candace.

Candace was something to see, with her long dark hair, that bold, beautiful face with the high cheekbones and the slightly Oriental look, that somewhat bony model's figure with those fabulous legs.

"I wasn't expecting you here at the airport," he told her when Toni had walked away.

"No, I see that you weren't." She was tall, and her eyes, on a level with his, were cool. "Who was she?"

"A girl I sat next to on the plane."

"You always manage, don't you?"

"I suppose so. I found you, didn't I?"

They walked together toward the baggage-claim counter.

"No kidding," he said, "why are you here?"

"I had the afternoon off. I thought we might get an early start."

"First, I ought to see my customer."

"Can't that wait till tomorrow?"

"I might arrange it that way."

They stood silently at the counter. Candace, though impatient, wasn't in a talkative mood. Ron Cormer could spare the conversation. He had an unforeseen problem to consider now.

He was safe on the ground. He had made the right decision, hadn't told anyone about the note or his suspicions or his fears. He had sweated it out, successfully. Now, what about the suitcase?

He could simply leave it here, not claim it, with some little explanation to Candace. Let the thing, if it were going to, blow up here. In case of a delayed explosion, there was little danger that anything could be traced to him. Or he could take the bag and chuck it in a river or a lake somewhere. Water would probably ruin the timing and detonation mechanisms, but even if it didn't . . .

What was he thinking about? There wasn't any bomb. He had already decided that, hadn't he?

"There's my bag," he told Candace.

He picked it up, and they walked out together. It was a quarter of a mile to where Candace had parked her red sports car. He didn't mind the walk. He liked the feel of the

solid ground under his feet, and the sun was shining brightly. There was always something deliciously wicked about making love in the middle of a beautiful, sunshiny day.

They drove to her apartment. Candace usually drove fast, but today she drove especially fast. She was peeved with him, jealous. Beth was jealous, and now Candace was jealous. He rather liked it that way.

Candace lived in a swank place. He had never known how she could afford it. There wasn't that much modeling work in this town. Yet she'd never asked him for money, and he'd never questioned her.

He wondered again, as Candace fiddled with the key, opened the door, and they walked inside, how Beth had ever found out about Candace Devereaux. He had met her quite accidentally. She had no connection whatever with his business or his customers. How much did Beth know? Did she know this address, for instance? Had she ever communicated with Candace?

Was such communication by any chance the reason, and not little Toni, for Candace's sour mood? The thought intrigued him. Should he ask?

"Make yourself at home," Candace told him.

He did. "I need a shower," he said. "For some reason it was hot

on that airplane. I've been perspiring a lot."

He placed his suitcase on the sofa. He'd need a fresh shirt, a complete change. He undid the two latches.

As he did so, and as he opened the suitcase, it occurred to him that there are different kinds of bombs. Some are constructed as booby traps, with a spring mechanism, and the thing explodes when . . .

The thought occurred to him very, very briefly.

Beth Cormer wasn't informed of her husband's death until the next day. It took the police that long to establish Ron Cormer's identity, then find his home address, then trace Beth's whereabouts to her sister Jenny's house. Beth received the news stoically.

"There was an explosion," the policeman said on the telephone. "We don't know yet exactly what happened. But there's absolutely nothing you can do here, Mrs. Cormer. There are a few little details I'd like to clear up, though. Could I come there to see you?"

"Of course," Beth answered.

"If I can catch the plane I'll be there early this afternoon," the policeman said.

"I'll be here," Beth assured him.

The policeman, Lieutenant Blake, a short, square man, arrived on schedule. Beth and Jenny received

him in Jenny's livingroom. Lieutenant Blake, after some routine expressions of sympathy, proceeded to business.

"Mrs. Cormer, your husband was in the apartment of a woman named Candace Devereaux. Miss Devereaux died in the explosion too. Did you know Candace Devereaux?"

"No, I didn't," Beth replied calmly. "My husband frequently had . . . girlfriends. I knew that."

"The explosion seems to have been caused by a bomb. The bomb, from what we've been able to gather, seems to have been in Mr. Cormer's suitcase. We have some charred pieces of the suitcase and some pieces of metal, rather twisted. Nothing else from the suitcase. There apparently was an attache case too. Nothing left of that. The bomb must have been in the suitcase. Now, we know that Mr. Cormer had just arrived in town by plane, and a plane and a bomb in a suitcase seem rather to suggest that the bomb had perhaps been intended to explode while the plane was in the air . . ."

Beth interrupted him by rising from her chair. "You mean," she demanded, "that somebody tried to murder him?"

The lieutenant shrugged.

"Or," she went on, "that he tried to murder someone else."

The lieutenant looked confused. "Who?"

"Me," Beth replied calmly. "The wife he didn't care for any longer. We left the airport on different planes at almost the same time, Lieutenant."

"But the bomb," Blake pointed out, "was in your husband's suitcase."

"Our bags were very similar in appearance," Beth explained. "There must have been a mixup at the airport. You see, I arrived here with my husband's luggage."

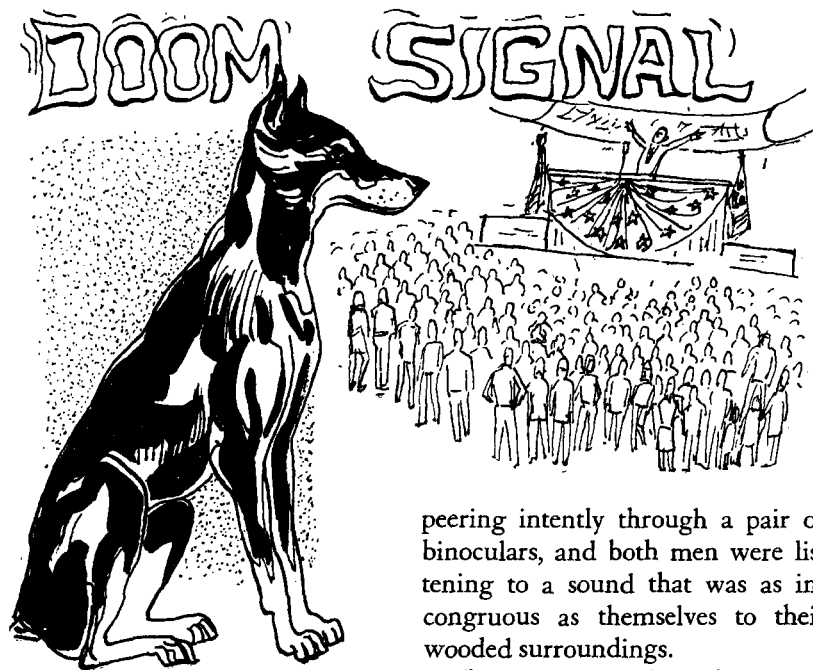
She walked to a closet, brought out a suitcase, and opened it to show the lieutenant. Inside were a man's suit and a collection of men's shirts, ties, socks, underwear.

"This is the bag I came with, isn't it, Jenny?" Beth asked her sister.

"Yes, it is," Jenny corroborated.



There may be little else one may expect from a rabid dogmatist . . .



THE TWO MEN crouched on the wooded hillside, their dark overcoat collars turned up against the brisk autumn air. In their neat suits and polished shoes they looked out of place in the brilliantly dappled woods, but this didn't seem to concern them. The man on the left was

peering intently through a pair of binoculars, and both men were listening to a sound that was as incongruous as themselves to their wooded surroundings.

The recorder and speakers were too far away to catch every word, and the nasal voice from the loudspeakers rolled like the incoherent voice of some ancient god over the hills. Now and then a word or a phrase stood out in the brittle air: "... Freedom . . . Cause for concern . . . Without another hope . . ."

"Here it comes," said the man

without the binoculars, turning his head to one side.

Straining to hear, they barely caught the wavering words, "... The death throes of a dying era ..."

The man with the binoculars steadied himself and leaned slightly forward. He saw a raised wooden platform on which stood a dressed straw dummy. Well to the side of the platform stood a sandy-haired man in an orange hunting jacket. About fifty feet from the platform sat a large, jet black Doberman pinscher.

As the last word rolled from the speakers the sleek dog erupted into

by
John Lutz

action. Its lithe muscles working like machinery, it shot toward the platform, leaped, and hit the straw man's throat like a missile. Straw flew, and the force of the Doberman's charge carried it past the platform, wisps of straw still clutched in its white teeth. It turned, pivoting beautifully in mid-air, and in the space of a second struck again. This time the head of the dummy toppled to the ground. The Doberman shook himself, disinterested now, and walked away to sit and wait for his pat on the head and his morsel

of food. The man in the orange jacket gave him both.

"He's getting better." The man who'd been watching through the binoculars let them fall against his chest and dangle by their leather strap.

"They don't have much time left," his partner said. Gray hair showed at his temples, below the brim of his conservative dark hat. His face was average, with eyes that might have been gray or blue. A markedly unnoticeable man.

The man with the binoculars took a quick look back at the clearing in the woods. "He's starting the routine all over again," he said. "Must take patience."

The gray-haired man nodded. "Shall we see this man Atwater?"

"It's the best advice we've had."

"The only advice."

They straightened, backed away until they were below the slight rise from where they'd watched, then they walked down the dirt road toward their late-model gray sedan. Behind them the distant, nasal drone of the loudspeakers began again.

The two men introduced themselves to Atwater as Sam Chambers and Ed Klein. They also introduced themselves as FBI agents.

"We understand the local police consult you on just about every-

thing concerning animals," said Chambers, the gray-haired man.

"I help them from time to time," Bob Atwater said. He was of medium height, with a shock of red hair and a ready smile. He poured three cups of coffee and set them on a long table. The furnishings in his livingroom were expensive and vaguely oriental. It wasn't the kind of place behind which you'd expect to find a kennel.

"Now," Atwater said, lowering himself onto the sofa with a sigh, "what's this one about?"

"We understand you used to train animals for television," Klein said, sipping his coffee and grimacing at its strength.

"For a while," Atwater replied. "You remember Rollo the Wonder Dog?"

"Sure," Chambers said with a smile. "But I'm afraid we have another sort of wonder dog on our hands, a dog trained to kill."

"To kill whom?"

"Attorney General David Ransone."

"Why?" Atwater asked, surprising them with his lack of reaction. "Political?"

"He's an attorney general," Chambers said, "running for senator."

"Who wants to kill him?"

"A man named Joe M'Cord, from upstate. He's training a big Dober-

man pinscher to attack him on the speaker's platform when he comes here this weekend."

"How big?" Atwater asked.

"About ninety pounds. Big enough."

Atwater nodded. "Why don't you arrest him, or at least tell him that you're wise to what he's doing?"

Klein spoke up. "Oh, he'd be easy enough to stop. We can't arrest him, of course, because he hasn't broken any law, but if he knew we were watching him he'd give up his plan."

Atwater twirled the coffee in his cup. "Then why don't you do that?"

"Because he'd devise another plan," Chambers said. "We can't watch him forever."

"What you want to do," Atwater said, "is not so much stop him as catch him in the act."

"Exactly," Klein said. "And we want to do it in such a way that we have a case. The problem is that the only way to do that is to let him go through with the plan to the last possible second, and we can't endanger the attorney general's life by letting a dog attack him and gamble that we can shoot it in time or pull it off. Besides, we can't go opening fire in that crowd. We can't do anything that might panic that crowd."

"You want it done unobtrusively," Atwater said.

"If possible."

"Ransone's going to speak at the West County Shopping Center parking lot," Klein said. "They figure to have well over two thousand people."

"What's the dog's signal to attack?" Atwater asked.

"A phrase in the speech," Klein said. "You've probably heard it. Ransone uses it in almost every speech to describe the actions of the incumbent senator and his staff: 'The death throes of a dying era.'"

Atwater nodded and thought a moment. "The dog wouldn't be signaled by the entire phrase," he said. "One word is a primer, to alert him, probably 'throes', then on the actual command word, 'era', he'd attack. I choose throes and era because they're the least common words and have the correct time lapse between them."

"You'll help us out on this then?" Chambers asked.

"I think I have an idea," Atwater said, "that will stop the plan and give you all the evidence you need. Besides, I plan to vote for Ransone."

The big red and white Ransone campaign bus pulled into the shopping center parking lot at three o'clock sharp. There were well over two thousand people on hand, Atwater estimated, as he stood back against the window of a men's shop about a hundred feet from the

speaker's platform. M'Cord, with his Doberman pinscher, had not yet made his appearance.

The loudspeakers mounted on the roof of the bus were blaring almost unintelligible campaign slogans as it rolled toward the flag-draped speaker's platform amid cheers and pennant and sign waving.

The Ransone girls got out of the bus first, forming a very beautiful aisle for Ransone and his traveling constituents. Ransone was the third man out of the bus. He was a smaller man than his photographs suggested, about five-six, with the clean-cut youthfulness that could help propel him to higher office. *Charisma*, Atwater thought with a smile,

Still louder cheers accompanied the men as they climbed the wooden steps to the platform. The cheering continued until County Supervisor Grogan raised his hands for silence. Then, with a smile, he began his long and carefully prepared introduction of Attorney General Ransone.

Atwater turned his head as he saw M'Cord threading his way through the crowd with the Doberman. He had figured M'Cord would place his dog about here. It was the location Atwater would have chosen, a short, straight run to the speaker's platform, with the minimum number of people in the

way. M'Cord walked slowly to the doorway of a defunct health club and hand-commanded the dog to sit. It obeyed perfectly, of course. Atwater had observed it once before, with the FBI agents in the woods, but up close the animal was even more impressive. Every bit of ninety pounds, it had the sleek litness and square sturdiness of a good show dog.

A shame, Atwater thought, that such a fine animal was being used for such an evil purpose. Of course the dog had no evil intent. To him it was merely an exercise, something he'd been trained to do by a loved master. The dog couldn't care less if it was the straw dummy or Attorney General Ransone whose throat he ripped out. He only wanted his morsel and his pat on the head when he was finished.

Ransone was beginning his speech now, in his distinctive nasal voice. Atwater looked around and saw Chambers and Klein. He nodded to them and turned the copy of Ransone's speech they had given him to the page with the phrase underlined in red pencil. He hoped that Klein and Chambers trusted him implicitly.

M'Cord gave the dog a firm hand signal and walked casually away, attracting no attention in his plain hat and light-colored raincoat. As the raincoat disappeared into the

thick of the crowd, Atwater saw Chambers follow. Both men would be over a mile away when the fateful words were uttered.

Atwater looked at the dog. It was sitting easily, without motion or sign of tension. It remained like that for the next five minutes.

The words spilling loquaciously from Ransone's lips were appearing on Atwater's printed page now, the one with the red underlines. He saw the attorney general's personal guards, who had been alerted, shift uneasily. Hands went beneath suitcoats and topcoats.

"Ladies and gentlemen, what we are witnessing . . ."

The eyes of every security man on the platform were trained on the sleek dog.

On the word 'throes' the Doberman stiffened and strained forward, its expression intent.

Then it relaxed, cocked its head and resumed its easy sitting position.

Ransone continued his speech. One of his personal guards smiled, and Klein nodded to Atwater without expression. One more paragraph and Ransone's speech was finished.

"Frankly," Klein said to Atwater, "I wasn't sure it would work."

Atwater smiled, fingering the ultra-high pitched 'silent' dog whis-

tle in his hand. "There's only one way to get a well trained dog to disobey a signal," he said, "and that is to arrange it so he can't hear that signal. When the signal word was spoken, the dog heard nothing but a shrill whistle that only his ears could pick up." Atwater looked over at the Doberman, still obediently sitting in the stay position. "Now we go about building our case."

The Ransone campaign bus had left, and almost all of the crowd was off the parking lot. Even now the local police were sealing off the lot and setting up their cameras.

When the lot was empty except for the police and cameramen, Atwater removed the straw dummy from the back of his station wagon and set it up on the speaker's platform while the cameras rolled. Then he stood well back and waited.

The loudspeakers buzzed and broke into the nasal, recorded voice of Attorney General Ransone, the part of the speech he'd just made containing the signal words.

On the word 'throes' the dog

strained forward as before. On 'era' he broke for the platform, and in a whirl of motion the dummy's straw throat was ripped out as the cameras recorded everything. The dog leaped back to complete the job on the now prostrate dummy.

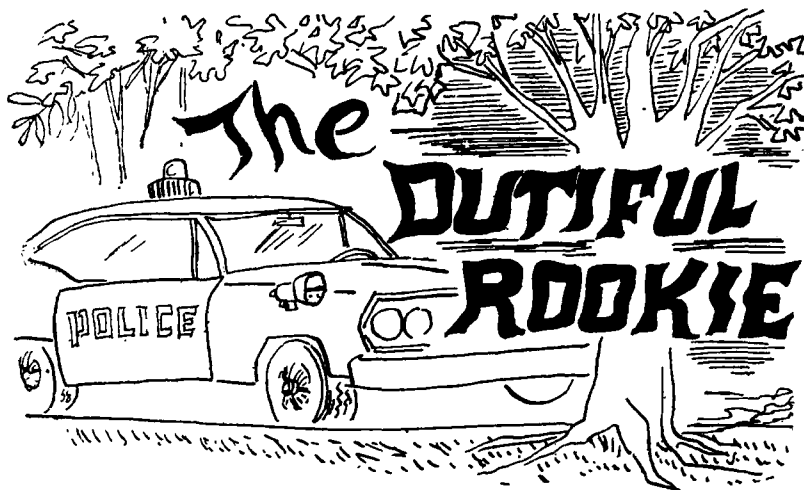
"The exact location," Atwater said, "the exact speech, almost the exact hour in front of witnesses and cameras. And plenty of people can testify that M'Cord was the one who placed the dog there. That should prove he was training him for the specific purpose of murdering Ransone."

Klein grinned and nodded. "And with your testimony that you blew that silent whistle the first time to prevent this from actually happening, M'Cord should be put safely away for a long time." He glanced at his watch. "Chambers should be arresting him just about now." He looked again at Atwater. "The government will see that you're well compensated for this, Bob."

"By way of thanks," Atwater said, "they can arrange it so I'll get the dog. He's a beauty, and I think I can un-train him in no time."



The straight line of duty may be enlivened by a slight digression, it seems, and yet elude the taint of dereliction.



KELLY claimed afterward that it was just like the ending of a late, late TV movie: the body of the bad guy lying on the floor; the young cop in the arms of the grateful heroine being soundly kissed for his timely assistance; and the young cop's dumb older partner arriving at the scene too late, as usual, for the action.

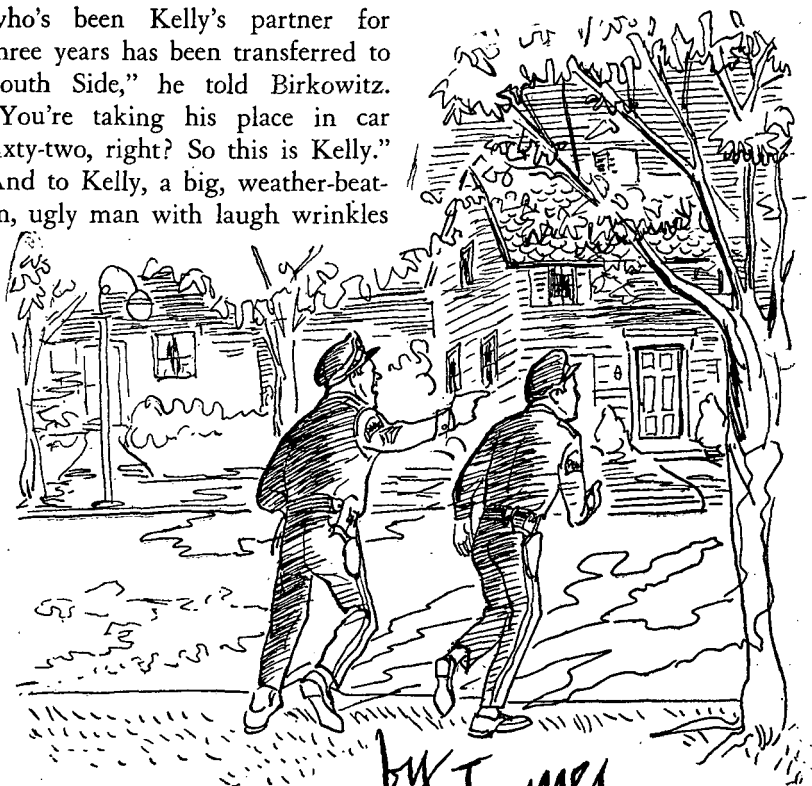
From the standpoint of Kelly's new partner, Birkowitz, however, it was infinitely more exciting and satisfactory than any movie. For three reasons: (1) Because this

wasn't any imaginary adventure dreamed up by some TV writer.

(2) Because Birkowitz, a brand-new rookie aching to prove himself, was unexpectedly given the chance to do so on his very first night as Kelly's partner. (3) Because he was so incredibly lucky as to make his first arrest as a full-fledged cop with admiring feminine eyes looking on.

When Birkowitz arrived for his first night of patrol duty at Station Six, the desk sergeant laconically introduced him to Kelly. "Guy

who's been Kelly's partner for three years has been transferred to South Side," he told Birkowitz. "You're taking his place in car sixty-two, right? So this is Kelly." And to Kelly, a big, weather-beaten, ugly man with laugh wrinkles



by James
Holding

around his eyes: "This is Lou Birkowitz, Kelly. Fresh out of the training course downtown. Fly at it, boys."

That was all. Kelly and Birkowitz said "Hi," to each other, shook hands, and went out together to car 62 in the station driveway, each examining the other with covert glances to size up the new partner assigned by the brass to share his dangers, excitements,

boredom and monotony for the foreseeable future . . . as well as the cramped confines of car 62.

Kelly suggested gruffly that Birkowitz drive the cruiser that first night to familiarize himself with it. Kelly handled the mike

and gave Birkowitz a guided tour of the territory they were supposed to patrol.

This was a rather quiet beat on the north side, Kelly explained, a good one for a rookie cop to cut his teeth on. It consisted of three-quarters of a square mile of quiet residential streets, a shopping center, a couple of blocks of commercial and professional buildings, and a few—less than a dozen—trouble-breeding spots, by which Kelly meant bars, taverns, all-night restaurants, and bowling alleys.

After an hour or so, the constraint that usually exists for a time between two complete strangers began to wear off a little. Birkowitz confided to Kelly that he sure hoped he'd be able to fill the shoes of Kelly's former partner all right but that, candidly, he was so green that Kelly would have to bear with him until he learned the ropes. Kelly, a middle-aged man who had seen rookies come and go through the years, said sure, as senior officer of the crew, he'd make the decisions for a while anyway, and all Birkowitz had to do was follow Kelly's instructions when they went into action as a team, and he didn't doubt for a minute that Birkowitz would catch on quick and make a better cop than his old partner had ever been.

Birkowitz nodded at this, and

said, "Thanks, Kelly, I'll sure try," and drove the police cruiser proudly.

An hour and a half after midnight their car number suddenly jumped out at them from the constant mutter of the police band to which their radio was tuned. "Car sixty-two? Car six-two. Come in."

Kelly spoke into the mike. "Here, car six-two. Kelly."

"Take this address," the dispatcher's voice came back tinnily. "1289 Moss Street."

"1289 Moss, gotcha," said Kelly.

"Lady reports a prowler. Where are you?"

"On Kent. Five blocks away."

"Get it," the dispatcher said. "Out."

Kelly hung up the mike and grinned at Birkowitz. "Lucky boy. Go two blocks north and turn right. Step on it."

Birkowitz stepped on it. "1289 Moss, was that it?"

"Right." They swept around the corner into Moss Street. "It'll be in the third block up, about the middle, left-hand side." The darkness of the tree-shaded street before them was relieved at intervals by pools of dappled leaf-shadows cast by street lamps.

Birkowitz's voice showed a shade of nervousness. "Regular drill, Kelly?"

Kelly glanced aside at his young

partner. "Well," he said, "the prowler, if any, still ought to be in there, Lou. It's less'n a minute since we got the call. Maybe we could take him in. That would be something, wouldn't it, your first night?"

"Yeah," said Birkowitz. "What do we do?"

"Drift up easy and look things over first." Kelly saw no headlights before or behind them to indicate any other traffic on Moss Street just then. He switched off their own headlights and the flasher on top of the cruiser, reaching across the wheel to do so. "Throw her out of gear and coast, Lou," he said. "I'll tell you when to pull up." A moment later he said, "Now," and the car glided almost without a sound to the curb, four houses short and across the street from 1289. Kelly turned down the volume of their radio until it was barely audible.

"Come on," he said in a murmur. "Quiet." They climbed out of the car, leaving the doors slightly open to avoid noise, and slid swiftly across the street, two ghosts among the leaf shadows.

Silently they trotted along the grass-pavement verge toward 1289, which was a modest, cracker-box shaped, two-story house set on a sixty-foot lot. It was in total darkness. The nearest street light, a hundred yards away, threw only a faint shadow-blurred suggestion of

illumination on the house front due to the intervening trees, yet with the help of starlight, it was enough for Kelly.

"Front door and windows closed, no broken panes," he whispered to Birkowitz, "so chances are the prowler got in through the back." They melted into the tree shadow before number 1289.

"Now what?" asked Birkowitz in a tight mutter.

"Give me two minutes to get around back and find where he broke in. Then you hit the front door with plenty of noise. Chances are he'll go out the way he went in, and I'll be waiting for him."

"Right," Birkowitz agreed. "Two minutes." He looked at his watch as Kelly disappeared into the narrow lane of blackness that separated 1289 from the house next door.

Kelly moved very quietly for a big man. He rounded the rear corner of 1289 on the double and found himself in a small back yard. A flight of three steps led up from the yard to a porch which masked the back door of the house.

Kelly mounted the three steps without hesitation and crossed the porch to the door. He saw that its upper half was composed of a dozen small panes of glass glazed into slender wooden sash. The pane of glass nearest the doorknob was

broken, and the door stood open about six inches.

Kelly shook his head—a familiar pattern. The prowler had broken the glass, reached a hand through, unlocked the door on the inside and walked in. Might as well have a sign posted saying *Welcome to Burglars* as a door like that, Kelly reflected.

He put his ear to the crack of the door and listened; nothing. He couldn't see anything but blackness in what he presumed was the kitchen beyond the door, not even any looming shapes of stove or refrigerator. He unbuttoned his holster flap, stepped to one side of the door into deep shadow, and glanced impatiently at the luminous dial of his wristwatch. He was surprised to see that only thirty seconds had passed since he left Birkowitz. A minute and a half to go before Birkowitz made his move—if he made his move. Kelly remembered uneasily the note of uncertainty in the kid's voice just a moment ago.

He was setting himself when he heard the scream. It came from inside the house—shrill, high-pitched, feminine, a little muffled as though by distance but with enough terror in it to raise goose-flesh on Kelly. The scream was followed almost immediately by a shattering crash, then a sodden-

sounding and ominous thump.

Kelly waited for no more. He charged through the back door, his shoulder nearly taking the door off its hinges as he passed. His eyes, more used to the darkness now, showed him dimly that the room he pounded through without pausing *was* the kitchen and that a rectangle of lighter darkness in the far wall was a doorway.

He leaped through that doorway into a hallway beyond, just as a light came on upstairs and shone down on the treads of a stairway rising on his right to the second floor. With his free hand, Kelly braked his momentum with a grip on the newel at the foot of the stairway, then swung himself around it like a monkey on a pole and went up the stairway two steps at a time.

He needn't have hurried, he saw, the moment his head came above the level of the upstairs landing, for that's when he took in the scene that he was later to liken to a TV movie.

A skinny, seedy-looking youth with streaked blond hair and no chin to speak of lay on the floor in a tangle of arms and legs at one side of the landing, among the scattered fragments of what had been a large, framed wall mirror. From the head of the stairs, Kelly could see the whites of the youth's eyes and, since he lay quite motion-

less, Kelly rightly deduced that he was out cold. A little to one side of the sprawled body, Patrolman Birkowitz stood with his arms around a diminutive brunette of such dazzling beauty that she would have drawn any male eye ineluctably, even if she had not been wearing a semitransparent nightgown, which she was.

She was engaged in kissing officer Birkowitz with obvious enthusiasm and, Kelly noted with a passing twinge of envy, Birkowitz was returning the favor with more than routine interest.

Enjoying the tableau, Kelly waited a moment at the head of the stairs. Then, gently, he cleared his throat. Birkowitz and the brunette broke apart with a reluctance for which Kelly could not entirely blame them.

"Birkowitz," said Kelly sternly, "didn't they teach you in that police school downtown that police officers are strictly forbidden to do any kissing while on duty?"

Birkowitz had the grace to flush guiltily; he did not, however, remove his arm from the dark-haired girl's waist at once. "Gee, Kelly," he began lamely, "I'm really sorry—"

The brunette cut him off. "Wasn't he tremendous?" she asked the world in an admiring voice. "Simply wonderful?"

"He musta been," Kelly said, "from the looks of things."

"Oh, he was!" the girl caroled. "You should have seen him throw that man bodily against the wall. And before that, when I screamed, he ran right upstairs without even stopping to think whether the burglar might have a gun and *kill* him!"

Birkowitz interrupted her. "Let me tell it," he said.

"You're too modest to tell it right." The girl regarded Birkowitz with shining eyes and turned back to Kelly. "I was sleeping in there, you see . . ." she waved toward an open door leading off the upstairs landing, ". . . when the sound of breaking glass downstairs woke me up. Then I heard our back door squeak open—it always squeaks when you open it—and I knew a burglar was breaking in. So I quickly shut my bedroom door and telephoned the police while the burglar was still downstairs and couldn't hear me."

Kelly nodded approvingly. "Good thinking, lady."

"In about two seconds I heard footsteps coming up the stairs, and I could see a little bit of light under my door, like a flashlight, you know?"

"It was a flashlight." Birkowitz pointed to a pencil flash lying with the burglar among the shards of

shattered mirror. He picked it up.

"I prayed he wouldn't come into my bedroom first," said the girl, "because there's no lock on the door of the bedroom, you see."

"You ought to get one," Birkowitz broke in.

She nodded her head. "I will. Anyway," she said to Kelly, "I was simply amazed at how fast you got here. I heard the burglar go into the guest room there, next to my room, and start pulling out dresser drawers. I kept watching out my window for you to arrive and, sure enough, there you were in less than a minute, it seemed; two policemen, one going around back and one staying in front. So I just naturally opened my window and called down to the one in front." She twinkled up at Birkowitz. "That was you, wasn't it?"

"Sure," said Birkowitz. "Who else?"

"Shut up," Kelly said. "Let her tell it, Birkowitz. She's doing all right. You said you called down to him, lady?"

"Yes. I called down to him to please hurry up because the burglar was in the next room and I was scared. The burglar must have heard me talking and thought I was telephoning the police, because he came bursting into my room and grabbed me and I screamed bloody murder."

"I heard you," Kelly said. "You got quite a scream, lady."

"But the burglar had no more than grabbed me when somebody came dashing up the stairs and grabbed *him*, and threw him clear out into the hall against the mirror. Then I turned the light on, and *you* came running in from the back, I guess . . ." Her voice trailed off and she gave Birkowitz another soulful look.

The burglar began to stir. When he emitted a falsetto moan, Birkowitz, very businesslike, walked over to him, stooped, brought the lax wrists together and slipped a pair of handcuffs on them, just as the police school had taught him.

Kelly scratched his head. "I guess I get the picture, lady. But tell me one thing. If you lock your back door at night, why not lock your front door, too?"

"Oh, I do, officer. Always."

"You do?" He stared at her in bewilderment. "Then how did Birkowitz get into the house so quick?"

Birkowitz straightened from his crouch beside the skinny burglar and flushed again. "I had a key to the front door," he said sheepishly. "I live here, Kelly."

"What!" Kelly reached out and steadied himself against his shock with a hand on the wall. He regarded his young partner uncom-

rehendingly for a moment, then uttered, "Well, how about *that!*" He looked at the tiny brunette. Then you're Mrs. Birkowitz?"

"Of course." She giggled. "Do you think I'm the type who goes round kissing strange policemen?"

Kelly shook his head. "Maybe not," he said defensively, "but sometimes women do funny things when they're . . . they're . . ." he roped, and finished, ". . . emotionally aroused."

The girl's merry laughter at this ally made it Kelly's turn to flush. Lou, I don't get it. You heard the dispatcher give me this address for the prowler, didn't you? Your own house?"

"Yeah."

"Then why didn't you *tell* me it was your house, for heaven's sake?"

Birkowitz was earnest. "I thought it was a gag, Kelly. Honest. I thought it was a joke that you and the dispatcher had fixed up to throw a little scare into me, your cookie partner, my first night. Maybe see how I'd behave, I don't

know." Birkowitz shrugged apologetically. "At the police school they warned us that when we got our assignments, there'd be some hazing from the veteran men. And besides, I'd just promised I'd follow instructions, and you told me to stay out front for two minutes before I hit the front door." He went to his wife and hugged her absent-mindedly. "When Tina yelled down to me to hurry, and then I heard her scream, I knew it couldn't be a gag, after all. So I got to her as fast as I could. You don't blame me for that, do you? My own wife?"

Kelly said, "No, I guess not. Now, take that punk there under your arm, Birkowitz, and let's get down and report in." He wagged his head. "I know one thing. The boys at Station Six'll never believe this one, never." He turned to the brunette and said genially, "Nice to meet you, Mrs. Birkowitz. And I can tell you privately that if your husband *hadn't* disobeyed instructions tonight, we'd have sent him back to the police school for a post-graduate course!"



A certain type of stealth, embellished by scrupulous attention to detail and experience, may defy ordinary adjudication.

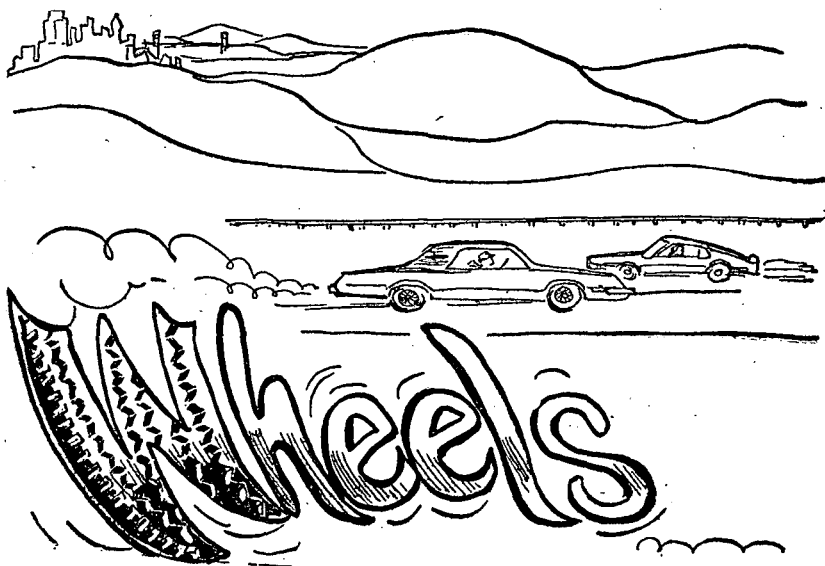
DAWN had just sneaked in with the first light of Monday, and the young man was well out of San Francisco, hiking south along the edge of the highway. He moved with a brisk, jaunty step, his arms swinging freely, his long legs pumping in a graceful stride. Fastened to his broad back was a white square of cardboard and printed

boldly in black on this makeshift placard were the words:

L.A.—PLEASE.

ALL THE WAY!

The cars snapped by at high speed, trailing little gusts of wind which sounded lonely to him, like fat old men sighing over pretty girls. He never once looked back for that was a wasted effort. Le



the sign do all the work for him.

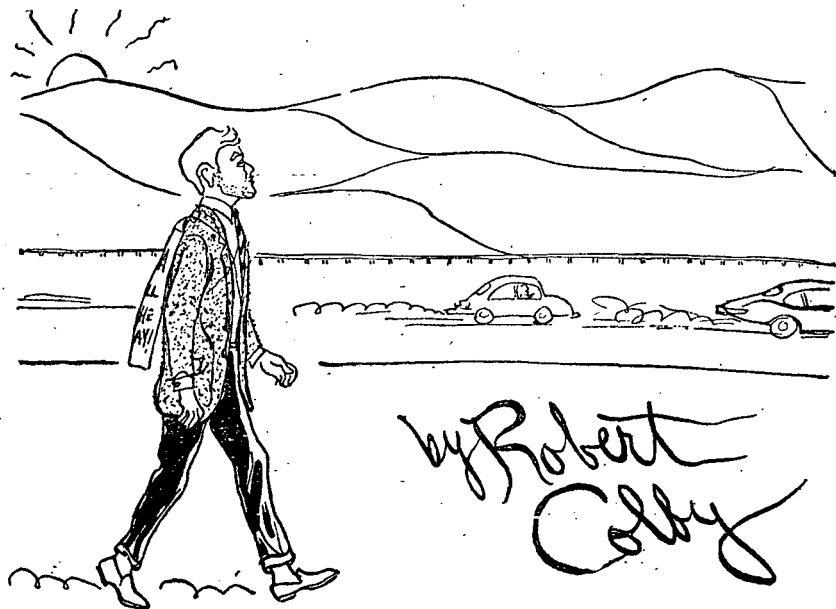
Chuck Lohman, sporting goods salesman for a San Francisco manufacturer, was driving to L.A. that Monday morning in his green convertible. He loved the car dearly, especially since it still had the gleam and aroma of newborn machinery, and he owned it free and clear.

Chuck had taken to the road before daylight and was in a hurry. In the late afternoon he had an appointment with his top buyer in L.A., and if the buyer would, as expected, agree to a big order on the new line, then Chuck would reward himself with at least a

couple of days at Santa Anita race-track, and three nights on the town, and if luck was with him, it would be a whole new ball game.

Anticipating these delights, Chuck was in fine spirits, and when he saw the hitchhiker with his funny-sad plea crudely printed on the square of cardboard, he took pity. Lifting his foot from the gas pedal, he braked and slid by slowly, turning his head for a front view of the man.

The hitchhiker was young, perhaps in his mid-twenties. He was tall, lean, and powerfully con-



structed, and despite its somewhat brazen and contemptuous mien, he had a strong face which denied the label of seedy bum his ragged costume suggested.

Chuck waited impatiently on the shoulder while the young man approached, not bothering to run, but keeping his determined pace until he arrived at Chuck's window on the driver's side and leaned against the door with a quizzical smile. His abundant crown of honey-blond hair was neatly cut to a decent length, but he badly needed a shave. His faded, shabby sport coat was at least a size too small, though he wore a tie, and a clean white shirt was tucked into scrubby black trousers. He was a contradiction.

"You going to L.A.?" he asked. It sounded like an accusation.

"That's right," Chuck admitted.

"All the way, no stops?"

Chuck smiled. "Express! Pile in, fella, I'm in a hurry."

Circling the car, the hiker removed the card from his back and tossed it carelessly away before climbing in. Chuck hustled the car up to cruising speed and for a space they rode in silence.

Chuck offered a cigarette and as they lighted up he said, "L.A. your home town?"

"Nope. Just visiting. If I have what you call a home town, it

would be San Francisco. You?"

"I live in San Francisco, but I have business in L.A. for a few days."

"What line you in?"

"Sporting goods."

"Sporting goods, huh. Well, from the looks of things, you're not suffering." He glanced about the interior. "Real nice set of wheels you got here."

"Thanks. It's one of the few things I own without strings."

"No payments?"

"Just one, the first and the last."

The hiker laughed freely, fine teeth gleaming, his face suddenly boyish and charming.

"What's your name?" Chuck asked.

"Ward. Ward Malley. Yours?"

Chuck introduced himself and though it seemed a foolish question from the look of him, asked Ward what he did for a living.

"Nothing," he answered. "I passionately avoid all forms of work. After I got out of college I tried at least a dozen different types of jobs. They all bored me. Forty hours of boredom in a white-collar jail with invisible bars—no thanks. You have just so many years to live on this earth and if you spend one third of them sleeping and another third working, what've you got? Work is for suckers, man."

"Well, you have a good theory,

Ward, but if you don't work, how do you buy the goodies, let alone the necessities of life?"

"I've got my own system for a fast buck," he said mysteriously.

"Wanna sell me a piece of the action, Ward?"

"I'd give it to you for free but, no offense intended, your type wouldn't be able to handle it. If you've got a square bone in your body, you'd strike out first time up."

Chuck was thoughtful. "In my life I never made a fast buck; except at the races. You ever bet the ponies?"

"Nope. The only bets I make are on a sure thing: myself."

"It's my one vice," Chuck continued. "I'm a nut for horse racing. Once I got in too deep and it took me a year to bail out. On the other hand, I paid cash for this car with a big win."

Ward was staring out the window, wearing an odd little smile. "Well," he muttered, "there's one born every minute—sucker."

Late in the afternoon they slid down from the freeway into Hollywood. "Any special place you want me to drop you?" Chuck asked.

Ward chuckled. "When you're broke, one street's as good as another. Put me down anywhere."

"You're just going to wander around? Don't you have any

plans at all?" he questioned.

"Nope. I don't make plans. I let things happen, then play it by ear."

Chuck pulled to the curb. "I'm turning off here," he said. "This okay?"

"Dandy."

Impulsively, Chuck reached for his wallet. "Could you use a couple of bucks, Ward? I'd be glad to—"

"No thanks. Two bucks wouldn't be of much use to me." Ward's face was a rebuke, his tone injured. "I need at least five for openers."

Chuck winced. "With your kind of nerve, you'll never starve," he said, not without a certain admiration, and Ward took the five he produced and tucked it into his pocket with a sly wink. They shook hands.

Ward got out and leaned inside. "How long you gonna be in town?" he asked.

"I'll be heading back in two or three days. Friday morning, I expect, unless something good turns up to hold me."

"Probably be going back Friday myself," Ward said.

"We could meet somewhere and I could give you a lift."

"Nope. Don't like to be tied to anything definite. Makes me nervous."

"That case, I'll keep my eye peeled for you along the road."



"Deal," said Ward, and he turned abruptly and went off down the block, moving typically with long strides and jaunty step.

Now that Ward had the five in his pocket, the seed of an idea began to sprout rapidly. The last week in San Francisco had been a disaster. He had run out of bread, the rent was long past due on his pad, he was locked out, and his suits and a couple of sport coats had been sold. Not that he couldn't score in San Fran—he could make it anywhere, but he never played games on home ground.

Ward spied a gas station and aimed himself for the men's room. It was locked, so he went around to the office and plucked the key from a hook. Some creep in a

uniform eyed him sternly from a little desk in a corner, but Ward stared him down.

Sealed behind the door of the men's room, he removed a paper-wrapped razor and shaving cream from his coat pocket, and went to work. He looked a lot better. The white shirt was clean and new, and his shoes were in good shape if you could see them for the dust. He took them off and washed them with damp paper towels, then shined them carefully with the lining of his coat.

He combed his hair and returned the gear to his pocket. Outside, he hung the key on the doorknob. A young woman in a sharp little foreign job sat waiting at the pumps. She observed him with

gleam of eye and wisp of smile. He winked at her and she turned away, lifting her little chin in snooty denial.

Caught you, didn't I, baby? he told her silently. But you couldn't face it head-on, could you? Well, sure, you had to play the phony game. Because everything's a pose, a lie and a cheat. Life is a cheat!

With these reflections, he went happily on his way. When you know the score everything and everyone is really terribly funny, and all your life, when you are tempted to take it seriously, you remember the bittersweet joke of it—and quietly laugh.

After a time of walking, in which Ward observed the scene about him with mocking amusement, he found what he was hunting. It was a grubby little second-hand store which sold clothing and assorted junk, most of it contributed by the rich and sold for charity. He went in.

At the rear of the store he discovered racks of suits. There were a good dozen in his size but he liked only one, a dark blue business suit of fine, expensive material. The suit might have been five or more years old but it had been beautifully kept. He yanked it from the rack and held it aloft for inspection.

"Would you like to take that

one, sir?" asked a woman who had appeared at his elbow. All the clerks were women, he had noted with interest. This one had a dried-prune face and bitter eyes. He rejected her immediately as a prospect.

"I haven't decided yet," he answered, "but you'll be the first to know."

Her lips tightened and she walked away. Across the room another woman was sorting clothing in a bin. She was plump and middle-aged and had a soft, bovine face of the sort which can be seen at almost any church supper where motherly types are serving their donated potato salad and fried chicken with tender smiles of self-sacrifice.

Presently Ward caught her eye and sent her his such-a-nice-young-man-with-the-sad-eyes-pleading-for-home-and-mother look. Her face warmed and she approached.

"Anything I can do to help you, dear?" she said sweetly.

"Well, I—I don't know." Hesitant, shy. "What do you think of this one?" He held the blue suit suspended toward her.

Standing back, pinching her chin thoughtfully, she squinted at the suit. "Yes," she said, "very nice. Hold it against you, dear."

He obeyed and she nodded sagely. "Oh-my-yes! Perfect! Just

perfect for you, I would think."

"You're very kind, Mrs.—?"

"Galloway. That's my name, dear; Galloway. I have a son about your age, I would think."

"Well now, I'm not surprised, Mrs. Galloway, because you seem to know exactly what a fella my age should have in the way of clothes. My own mother, God rest her, was so very much like you. She passed on just a few days ago."

"Ahhh, you poor thing!"

"Yes." Ward shook his head gravely. "Suffered horribly, right to the end."

"Oh dear. Dear, dear."

"She was in the hospital a long time. All for nothing. And so expensive. I had to sell everything, even my clothes. That's why I'm here, you understand." He paused, his face wrenched in sorrow. "Sorry, didn't mean to tell you my troubles, Mrs. Galloway. Uhh—how much is this one?"

"Only fifteen dollars, I would think. Yes, everything on that rack is fifteen dollars, dear."

"Fifteen dollars?" His face drooped. "Very reasonable, of course, but I'm afraid—" He returned the suit to the rack and for a moment stood caressing the material longingly. "Tomorrow I would have the money, but today, when I need it most, I have only

five dollars to spare for a suit."

"Why don't you let me put it aside until tomorrow, then, dear?"

"Well, I'm starting a new job tomorrow—that's the irony of it. They're arranging an advance for me, but of course I can't possibly report in these—these rags."

"No, of course you can't! Certainly not! Now you go and put that suit right on, young man. There's a little room in the back over there, and if it fits you, then don't you worry. We'll figure something out."

A few minutes later, splendid in the blue suit which gave him somewhat the appearance of a junior executive slumming, Ward stood near the door with Mrs. Galloway. At his feet was an aging but quite respectable suitcase, the best he could find in the store, priced at ten dollars. It now contained his old clothes; his slim possessions were in a cardboard box at the bus depot, he had told her, when he conned her into letting him add the case to his debt.

"Sure you won't take the five dollars on account, Mrs. Galloway?" he asked now. "I was only gonna use it for a cheap little room somewhere, but I can snooze just as well in the bus depot."

"I wouldn't dream of it!" she replied. "I got paid yesterday and

I have plenty left; all I'll need."

"You mean to tell me," he said with a look of shock and dismay, "that you *personally*—And here I thought the store would be carrying me, and that you only—"

"I trust you, dear," she said, "just as I would my very own son. Now you run along and you pay me when you can. No hurry."

"Long as I live, I'll never forget you, Mrs. Galloway," Ward said earnestly, his voice choking up.

Her benevolent smile followed him out the door.

Swinging the featherweight suitcase merrily, he walked for several blocks until he located a garage with a sign announcing auto repairs. Behind this garage, as expected, there were waste barrels containing worn parts and scraps of metal. From one of the barrels he scooped sheets of newspaper which he used to wrap the discarded metal and parts, then placed them in the suitcase so that they were wedged together snugly.

Twenty minutes later he entered an imposing Sunset Strip hotel. He bought a pack of cigarettes to change the five and went toward the desk, a bellhop relieving him of the heavily fortified case en route. With a flourish, he signed the register in the name of Russell D. Galloway and added a phony address in Sacramento.

The bellhop escorted him to a thirty-a-day room where he deposited the case-load of scrap metal and palmed his dollar tip with indifference. Ward took a leisurely bath, reentered the regal blue suit, tore a square from one of the silky white bed sheets, and fashioned a breast pocket handkerchief. Immaculately groomed, elegantly attired, he went below to the hotel dining room.

The dimly lighted, tastefully appointed room was crowded. Ward refused the invitation of the hostess to lead him to a table, telling her that he was hunting a friend. Skirting the tables, he approached a row of booths. Glancing in each as he passed, he paused at one which was just then being vacated by a foursome. He quickly took possession.

Happily, the customers had been generous. There were seven dollars and coins on the plate. Instantly, Ward reduced the tip to a dollar and change. Pocketing the other six, he studied the menu with frowning concentration.

In a minute the waitress arrived. Greeted by the niggardly tip, she scowled and said snappishly, "Sorry, sir, the booths are reserved for groups. I'm sure the hostess can find you a single."

Ward smiled amiably. "I'm delighted to hear that the booths are

reserved for groups, honey, because I'm expecting three other gentlemen. Since they may be a little late and I'm famished, I'll go ahead. Let's begin with a double martini on the rocks. It should be very dry, having only a nodding acquaintance with vermouth. Right behind it, if you please, the soup du jour; a Caesar salad, and the Chateaubriand, medium rare. Dessert? Well, that's a monumental decision which we'll arrive at later in deep conference . . ."

When he signed the check, Ward inserted a noble tip and offered his apology to the waitress; no doubt the three gentlemen had been delayed in the rush-hour traffic.

He went to a movie and turned in early. It had been a nice little warm-up, very amusing, but so far, just penny-ante stuff. In the morning the real game would begin, no limit, with jokers wild. As usual, he didn't have a definite plan, but he was a sharp opportunist, there were suckers born every minute, and there was a gimmick around every corner.

Shortly after eight a.m., Ward had an enormous breakfast sent to his room and signed the check. Well fed and neatly dressed, his mind a veritable computer waiting to be programmed for a fresh assault on mankind, he took the

elevator to the top floor. An idea had come to him but it required certain factors to be in his favor; and when these didn't materialize as he moved about the corridors as if in search of a room number, he went below to another floor, and then another, where he spied a maid entering a room with a passkey, towels across her arm.

That was good, that was fine, but he needed another joker to complete the hand. He found it around the corner in the form of a distinguished-looking type who was just departing from his room. Ward watched him and when the man got on the elevator, he hurried off in search of the maid.

"Left my key in the room," he told her. "Wonder if I could trouble you to let me in?"

"Certainly, sir. No trouble at all." He lead the way and she opened the door smoothly. He gave her a dollar and his princely smile, and slipped in.

It was a bad move. The room was not empty. There was the buzz of an electric razor. Frozen just inside, he was about to make a stealthy exit. He changed his mind. The sound came muted, as if from behind a closed door. He toed forward and peeked. Yes, the guy was in the bathroom and but for a crack, the door was shut.

There were twin beds and ob-

viously the distinguished type had a friend. Across one of the beds clothing had been laid out precisely. On the night table were keys, a checkbook, and a fat wallet. He reached the wallet soundlessly and examined it. There was a considerable amount of money, also business cards and two credit cards of the sort honored from coast-to-coast.

Ward transferred one of the credit cards and a business card to his pocket. He glanced again at the cash but passed it up with a shrug. He had scruples against certain forms of stealing, like lifting money from a man's wallet. It took the fun out of the game and put him in a class with punks and petty thieves. Besides, when a man discovered his cash was missing, he would check to see if his credit cards had gone the same way.

Ward opened the checkbook, his ear cocked for the continuing hum of the razor. The last figures in the book revealed a balance of eleven thousand, four hundred seventy bucks and change in a San Diego bank. Interesting. With no formalized intent, Ward thumbed to the back of the book and tore out several checks, folding them into his pocket. With his bed-sheet handkerchief he wiped wallet and checkbook free of his prints before restoring them

to the table. He ignored the keys.

Seconds later he had fled the room, closing the door silently behind him. Waiting for the elevator, he read the business card. The man was James P. Whatley of the Whatley Construction Company. Interesting. It was going to be a pleasant and profitable day.

It began with a list of pawnbrokers taken from the yellow pages. There were several spread around the city, enough to get the job done. After practicing Whatley's signature, as signed on the credit card, he spent the morning in an orgy of credit purchases at more than a dozen stores. He spent the afternoon hocking, among other items, expensive watches, binoculars, sterling silver place settings for eight, an electric guitar, a hunting rifle, and two portable color TV sets. He delivered these spoils in a car rented with the same credit card, safely pawning only two mixed items at any one broker.

The total take at the close of the business day was six hundred ninety dollars.

En route to the hotel he paused at the thrift shop and pressed twenty-five dollars into Mrs. Galloway's meaty palm. Then he presented her with a gift-wrapped bottle of perfume which had cost James P. Whatley forty dollars plus tax.

"My dear, dear, boy," exclaimed Mrs. Galloway, her voice submerged in the depths of emotion, "I can't tell you how touched I am that you would spend such a large part of your little advance on this sweet present for me. You are absolutely the most generous young man I've ever met, and the most honest. How I wish you were my own son."

"I—I'd like that very much," he said shyly, his eyes averted. "I suppose it's kinda silly—but may I call you—mom?"

So back to the hotel again and another grand meal, on the house, after which Ward bought a paper and went to his room. It had occurred to him that maybe he could buy cheap wheels for a couple of hundred and still have enough bread left to last him a month in San Fran. He began to screen the auto listings in classified.

Arriving at the Cs, he examined Comets for sale and was about to skip past Continentals when his eye was attracted to an ad in large type. A recent widow was disposing of her husband's Continental which, the ad boasted, had been driven only four thousand miles and could not be distinguished from a new one, though it was last year's model. According to Ward's calculation, the widow wanted a good five hundred more than simi-

lar cars were bringing. So she was greedy, and greedy people were the easiest to sucker, he concluded. Besides, he was always at his best with women.

He called her. She sounded younger than he had imagined. Her voice contained the over-anxious, stridently pleasant quality of one who is not getting any takers at the price. He took down the address and said he would be over shortly. He gave his name as James Whatley; she said she was Mrs. Hendrix.

Mrs. Hendrix lived in one of the prime sections of Beverly Hills. It was a small house, comparatively, yet Ward figured its worth at close to fifty thousand in the location. He rang the bell and Mrs. Hendrix appeared. She was in her late thirties, he judged. She had dark red hair and was rather tall. Her figure was strikingly assembled, but her angular features just missed being homely.

"I'm Valerie Hendrix," she beamed, delivering her soft hand into his. "Won't you come in?"

He glanced about the livingroom, finding the pieces a bit too aggressively modern for his taste. "Now let's see," said Valerie Hendrix, "your name again is—?"

"Whatley. Jim Whatley. Here, let me give you one of my cards."

She glanced at the card. "My,

you seem awfully young to have your own construction company, if I may say so, Mr. Whatley." Her smile made it a compliment.

"Well, to be perfectly frank, the business came to me via my father—at his death, that is. So I can't take more than a modest share of the credit."

"In a town crawling with phonies, I do admire that sort of honesty," she buttered, standing tensely poised, as if eager to conclude the niceties and open the contest. "You're from San Diego, I see by your card."

"A good town," he said. "Solid people with roots."

Nodding, she smiled vaguely. "Well, would you like to see the car?"

"Yes, indeed. Ready when you are, Mrs. Hendrix."

"We can go through the house," she said. "It's out in the garage." He followed her to a door off the kitchen which opened into the garage, already lighted. The Continental was a glistening yellow sedan with a black vinyl top. He circled it mutely, bending here and there to inspect it with a judicial pursing of the lips. Climbing in, he checked the interior in minute detail, then started the motor and tried gadgets which performed instantly on command.

The car seemed flawless; a poor

man's dream, a rich man's toy. He cut the motor and for a spell sat pensively behind the wheel.

Having kept herself studiously removed, Mrs. Hendrix now appeared at the passenger window. "Well, how do you like it, Mr. Whatley?"

"I'm not crazy about the color," he lied. "A little too flashy for my taste. And the front tires show a slight tendency to wear unevenly," he composed, "which would indicate a need for front-end alignment."

"Oh? I hadn't noticed that." She chuckled apologetically. "I'm not very knowledgeable about things mechanical."

"Otherwise," he continued solemnly, "the car seems in pretty nice shape."

"Would you like to take it for a ride?"

"Oh, naturally. That's a must. But it would be pointless until we've had a little talk about price." He shook his head ruefully. "I'm a pretty cautious guy, Mrs. Hendrix, and I've studied the market. Truthfully, you're way up there in the clouds—five or six hundred above ceiling. If you've had even one prospect, I'm sure he told you the same thing."

She nodded. "Yes, but this is not at all an average car. It's still a *new* car, brand-new as you can

see. My husband was a fussy driver and he put only four thousand some odd miles on the car right here in town. Four thousand miles on a car like this is a joke. Why, it's hardly broken in."

"That's true, and I'll be the first to agree, Mrs. Hendrix, but I think you're missing an important point. Even if the car never left this garage, it has still depreciated one year in resale value. This is not to say that its fine condition won't bring a reasonable sum above retail, but I do think you're shooting for the moon." His smile was charming.

"Well, let me ask you this, Mr. Whatley. Are you interested in the car? Would you buy if we could come to terms?"

"If we could come to terms, certainly, provided it drove out okay. Yes, I'd buy it."

She sighed, smiling as one who is about to surrender. "In that case, let's go for a nice long ride. We'll talk and we'll reach an agreement. Then we'll come back and I'll fix a drink and we'll toast your new car."

He laughed easily. "Better yet, we'll drive along the coast and I'll buy you a drink or two at one of those salty places, the kind that hangs right over the ocean. After a couple of drinks I tend to be much more pliable."

"If that's a promise, I may get you loaded and sell you my house in the bargain," she said gaily. "And now give me a minute to get a coat and lock up. My daughter's away at school and I'm all alone here."

They returned after midnight. She was quite stoned, and he was feeling no pain. They were calling each other Val and Jim, there had been a heated exchange of lips in a parking area at the edge of the beach. Ward had agreed to buy the car at three hundred below her figure, and once settled, the subject had been dropped.

At mid-morning she woke him gently, then eased out of bed and put on a skirt and sweater. While he showered and dressed, she fixed breakfast. Over a second cup of coffee she said with a sigh of resignation, "Well, I suppose you've forgotten all about buying the car—or you've changed your mind."

He laughed and replied, "Not at all, Val. A deal is a deal."

She brightened. "But you really do *want* the car, don't you?"

"Of course! D'you think I'd buy it if I didn't?"

"Well—"

"Fifty-seven hundred, right?"

"Right."

"Have you got the papers?"

"In my desk, I'll get them."

"Fine, honey. I'll write you a

check for the full amount. Okay?"

"A check?"

His smile was gently scornful. "Sure, a check. Did you think I'd carry around fifty-seven hundred in cash without an armed guard?"

"No, I guess not." Her own smile wavered. "If it were anyone else, I'd worry about a check. But since we're practically old friends . . ."

"Even if I were a total stranger, there would be no risk. Is the car insured?"

"Yes. Why?"

"Because under the theft provision, you'd be covered. If someone buys your car with a rubber check, it's essentially the same as if the car were stolen off the street. If the car isn't recovered in thirty days, the insurance company pays off in full."

It was true, and as he wrote the check, the knowledge erased his guilt. One didn't steal from widows, but a giant insurance company was always in season for plucking.

He passed her the check and her eyes worked it over. She looked up. "A San Diego bank," she said doubtfully. "Well, that's okay, it'll clear in a couple of days. Listen, I'll go and get the pink slip, the title. I'll just be a minute."

She went out, closing the door behind her, but in a moment he opened it a crack and listened.

Sure enough, she was on the phone to San Diego. There was a delay but pretty soon he could tell that the bank had given her the good news; there was plenty in the account to cover the check. He grinned.

She returned with the title. "It's been properly signed," she said. "You can fill in your name and the rest of it later."

He called the rental agency and a man came to pick up the car. The man figured the mileage and got Ward's phony signature for the charge. Then Ward gave Valerie a quick brush, telling her he had an urgent business appointment.

"See you next week, for sure, baby; and how about a long kiss to hold me until then?" Waving, he wheeled off in the bright yellow Continental, really a new car, driven only four thousand fussy miles about town.

Ward sold it to a dealer an hour later for five thousand, with much pretense of shrewd haggling. He cashed the check and then from another dealer, after some very real haggling, he bought a secondhand convertible, truly a "cream puff of a car, friend, in showroom condition," and it was, indeed, almost up to its billing. He paid three thousand cash, pocketing two, and registering the car in his legal name. He went back to the hotel

and spent the night, and in the morning he drove out of town, leaving his case-load of scrap metal in payment of the outsized bill.

A few miles north of Santa Barbara Ward spied the hitchhiker, a well-dressed man carrying a suitcase and trudging along dejectedly on the shoulder of the highway. It required no great decision, because there, but for the love of God . . . So he stopped at once. The man opened the door and got in, tossing his case to the rear seat. Ward recognized him instantly.

"Be damned!" he said. "You're the guy who picked me up on the road south! Chuck—Chuck Lohman, right?"

Gaping, Lohman squinted, and then he got it. He said, "I can't believe it! The transformation, I mean—the clothes, the car. What sky did you fall from?"

Ward smiled and fed gas, chewing up the road. "I fell from heaven or climbed from hell," he answered. "Take your choice." He paused, turned to look sharply at Lohman. "So what happened to your wheels?"

Lohman lit a cigarette. "Long story short—I wanted to quit my job and play the ponies. So I went to the track with a system, and it broke me. I sold the car and tried again. Now I have no car and no money—cleaned. With luck, I still have a job."

"Nice going, sucker," said Ward cheerfully.

He deposited Lohman at his doorstep in San Francisco. They shook hands and Ward opened his wallet. "Here's that five spot I owe you," he said, grinning.

Lohman took the five and examined it sourly, then handed it back. "No thanks," he said. "The kinda trouble I got, a five wouldn't help much. I'll need at least ten."

"Man, you've got guts," Ward said, "but I like your style. Glad to see you're finally wising up, sucker." He put the five away and produced a twenty. Lohman took it with a wink, and started up the steps.

As Ward drove off, he began to laugh and couldn't seem to stop. The whole deal struck him as terribly funny.





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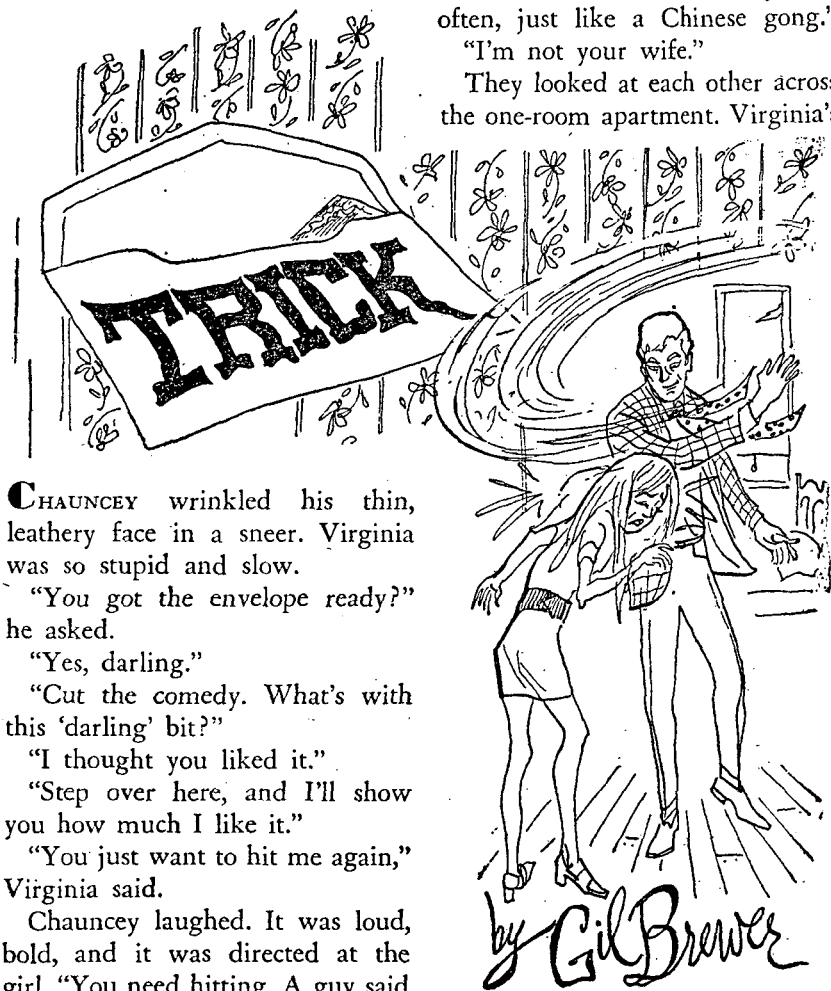
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It has been observed that intellect is invisible to the man who has none.

often, just like a Chinese gong."

"I'm not your wife."

They looked at each other across the one-room apartment. Virginia's



CHAUNCEY wrinkled his thin, leathery face in a sneer. Virginia was so stupid and slow.

"You got the envelope ready?" he asked.

"Yes, darling."

"Cut the comedy. What's with this 'darling' bit?"

"I thought you liked it."

"Step over here, and I'll show you how much I like it."

"You just want to hit me again," Virginia said.

Chauncey laughed. It was loud, bold, and it was directed at the girl. "You need hitting. A guy said a wife should be struck every so

blonde hair was ratty, hanging straight to her shoulders. She was thin, her bones were tired-looking knots, and the skimpy blue mini-dress didn't help. Blue eyes peered from deep sockets with a curious sadness. Her mouth was small, red and tight. Below high cheekbones, the cheeks were sunken, and deep lines grooved from each nostril to the corners of her lips.

She said, "Why can't I leave, Chauncey? Why d'you hang onto me? Why won't you let me go?" Her voice was a trying whine, touched with resignation.

"'Cause I like you around, baby."

That's all he ever told her, but she knew, and he knew she knew, that she was his beating post. It made him grin inside. He needed her. He needed someone to subjugate, and the girl was perfect. They traveled everywhere together, and he kept her in a perpetual state of suspense. She knew she would be bounced around, but when? It always happened sooner than she expected.

A short-con artist, Chauncey had come over from London and found good pickings in the cities along the Eastern seaboard. He liked having Virginia with him. They lived in cheap hotel rooms, an occasional dusty, linoleum-floored apartment.

"Where's the envelope?" Chaun-

cey asked. "I told you to fix it."

"In your breast pocket. It's all addressed."

"The gimmick?"

"In your side pocket. It's cut just right, and I found a sheet of green. You shouldn't take those chances. I keep telling you to use a one-dollar bill, Chauncey. You only lose a dollar, and it's safer that way."

"Why give 'em a buck?"

"Anyway, everything's ready. You picked a spot?"

"Yeah. Stan's Liquors, on Second Avenue. Plenty business, but lots of dead time just the same. And Stan's a plowhead."

"You taking a gun?"

"You know it."

"Why d'you take a gun, Chauncey? It's such a chance. Suppose something happened? Suppose you used it? What then?"

"Shut your yap. You make me sick."

"Chauncey. Let me go home. I'm sick of all this. Traipsing from one town to another. You always beating up on me."

He leaped across the room. She cringed, plastering herself against the flowered wallpaper. He grabbed her by the shoulders and shook her. He was laughing quietly. He shook her hard. Then he slapped her face viciously. He gave her a push and she sprawled across the bed, the springs jouncing.

"Please, Chauncey," she whined.
"Please, please, please. That's all you can say. You're stupid. I carry you, don't I? Well? Then be thankful."

"But—why? Why d'you want me around?"

He sneered, rocking on his heels. "Because I like you around, see? Ain't that enough?" He was dressed nattily in pale gray, and a maroon tie with a tiny diamond stickpin. He reached to the foot of the bed, snagged a soft felt hat. "Where's the change?"

"Right on the table. Nineteen dollars."

Chauncey pocketed the pile of crumpled bills, the extra loose change. He touched his breast pocket, fingered his side jacket pocket. Virginia watched him with her lips open.

"C'mon. We'll go take 'im."

"Do I have to come?"

"You know you have to come. You're my good luck piece." He laughed. "A hot one, ain't it? Get it? On your feet, stupid. Chauncey Moorehouse rides again."

"A lousy twenty dollars," Virginia said.

"It's enough. Tomorrow I'm gonna work five twenties. I'm gonna do it every day for a week. We spend the rest of this afternoon lining up joints."

"Okay. I'm ready."

They left the Hobart Arms, strolled along the street. Every now and again Chauncey yanked at Virginia's arm, and she would yank back and glare at him. Then maybe he would knuckle her in the kidney. On the corner, he tapped the gun holstered under his left arm. It felt comfortable. He'd never used it, but it made him feel big-time, somehow.

"I'm not coming in," Virginia said.

"Who asked you? Don't come in, then."

"I wish we could have a bottle."

"Bottle help you, baby?"

"Some gin, maybe? Something?"

"See what I can do."

She was immediately excited. "Would you, Chauncey?"

"I'll see."

He gave it some thought. Four bucks, probably, for a fifth. Not for stupid, either. He could use it; he felt like a drunk. It was just what he needed. Well, wait and see.

"Here we are. Stan's Liquors."

"There's nobody inside."

"Yeah. Okay, you wait."

"I'll be right here, Chauncey."

"You better be, stupid."

"Don't say that."

"Ah, shut up."

He left her, walked to the entrance, and stepped inside. It was a small closet-like store, with bottles in the windows, bottles racked by

the door, bottles on the walls, on the counter, everywhere. Hand-lettered signs proclaimed vast reductions in prices.

"Hi, there," Chauncey said to the plump, pale-faced man behind the counter by the cash register. The man wore a tan shirt, open at the throat, and black trousers. He had an open, almost merry face.

"Fine," the man said. "What can I do you for?"

Chauncey smiled pleasantly, stepped quickly to the counter. "In a darned rush," he said. "Got to meet my girl." He began hauling out the mass of crumpled bills, the loose change. "Could you give me a twenty for this change, here? What my girl don't know won't hurt her."

"Sure, sure." The pale-faced counterman punched the cash register, withdrew a twenty, snapped it, and handed it to Chauncey.

"Thanks," Chauncey said. "Mailing it to my brother. He's in a fix in Tucson, tight up. I can only spare twenty, the way things are." As he talked, he drew out the stamped, addressed envelope—phony name and address—and somehow the twenty dollar bill vanished and the slip of paper, dark green, was in his palm, and then inside the envelope. He sealed the envelope slowly, tapped it against his fingers as the counter-

man finished counting the change. "Thanks, again," Chauncey said. "Where's the nearest—"

"There's only nineteen bucks here. You're short a dollar."

"What?"

"Right." The pale-faced man shook his head. "Sorry, old buddy. But that's how it is. Here, you count it."

"No. I believe you. Now, ain't that a hot one?" Chauncey shook his head and gusted a sigh. "You're positive?"

The counterman nodded. "Yup." Chauncey's face lit up. "I got it," he said. "Here. You just hold this twenty, in the envelope. Rather than break it open and all, I'll run down an' meet my girl, get the buck from her. Be right back. Okay?" Chauncey shoveled the nineteen dollars from the counter back into his pocket.

The counterman was hesitant. He didn't want Chauncey to think he didn't trust him. Sighing, he took the envelope. "Hurry it up, though. I'm closing in ten minutes."

"Thanks," Chauncey said. "I'll make it snappy."

He started for the door. The counterman was placing the envelope on the cash register. Chauncey felt good. He'd made twenty dollars. The world was right.

The counterman's back was

turned. Chauncey paused by a liquor rack, grinned to himself, lifted a bottle, tucked it under his arm and headed for the bright sunlight.

"Wait!" It was the counterman. He'd seen him.

Chauncey whirled. Somebody was coming in the door, a short, fat man in black. The counterman's face was a dark cloud. Chauncey was caught with the goods, and it was a lousy feeling.

Then he knew he couldn't wait, couldn't do any false apologizing, because if the counterman ever opened that envelope it would be a mess.

"The hell with you," Chauncey said, turning for the door. The short man in black was in the way.

"Stand still or I'll shoot," the counterman said.

Chauncey turned again. The counterman was nervously holding a revolver.

Chauncey acted on impulse. He dropped the bottle and it broke. He cursed, grabbed the .32 automatic from its holster under his left arm, and pumped four slugs into the counterman. It was over with so quickly, Chauncey couldn't really believe it had happened. The plump man sank behind his counter, making strange noises, bleeding in the chest.

The short man in black threw

up his arms as Chauncey headed for the door. They collided. Chauncey cursed, brandished the automatic. The man scurried for the side of the liquor store. Chauncey made the street.

"Virginia!" he called.

She wasn't there, and he couldn't wait. He ran for the corner, thinking, *Now I've done it, now I've done it.* He reached the corner, saw a cab, flagged it, and was inside in seconds. He kept stretching, looking for Virginia, but there was no sign of her.

He left the cab a block from the apartment house and hurried to the apartment. Virginia must have got tired of waiting and headed for home.

She wasn't there. The apartment was empty, and the more he glanced around, the emptier it looked.

He'd made it. He'd got the twenty—and he had killed a man. But nobody knew him in town. They'd only been here two days, and the only person who'd seen him was the short, fat man dressed in black. He'd made a clean getaway. He began to breathe easier.

Then he checked the apartment, and realized Virginia's suitcase was gone. He got tight all over, because he knew she'd finally done it. She'd taken the chance and scrambled. She was gone, and he

was alone again. That was that.

Well, what loss? Not much. He could find another. After over a year of making her go with him, knocking her around, ridiculing her, destroying her, he dismissed her from his mind.

He grinned and took out the twenty, and looked at it. He had over a hundred dollars. It would take him to another town, and he would leave immediately. He began packing.

There was a knock at the door.

He stood there. Now, who the hell would that be? It couldn't be trouble, anyway.

Then he knew. It was Virginia. She'd come back. She needed him.

He hurried to the door, swung it open, and started yelling something at her. He closed his mouth.

The uniformed cop stepped quickly aside. The short, fat man in black shouted, "That's him!"

A plainclothes cop stepped forward. "Chauncey Moorehouse?"

"Yeah—yes."

"I'm arresting you for the murder of Stanley Griner, owner of Stan's Liquor Store, on Second Avenue.

Mr. Moorehouse, anything you say now may be held as evidence."

Chauncey stared at him.

The cop had a big red face with small brown eyes. He looked very grim. He leaned forward, rapped Chauncey under the arm, plucked the automatic from its holster, and stood there staring at it. He sniffed it.

"Ballistics will confirm it, anyway," he said.

"But," Chauncey said, "how—?"

"Oh, yeah," the plainclothesman said. "Guess you would like to know." He drew an envelope from his pocket. "See?" he said. "Right here. Mr. Griner lived long enough to say you'd left this behind."

"But, that ain't no—"

The cop was grim. "It's not just the envelope, Mr. Moorehouse. It's what's inside."

The cop drew out the slip of dark green paper, and showed it to Chauncey:

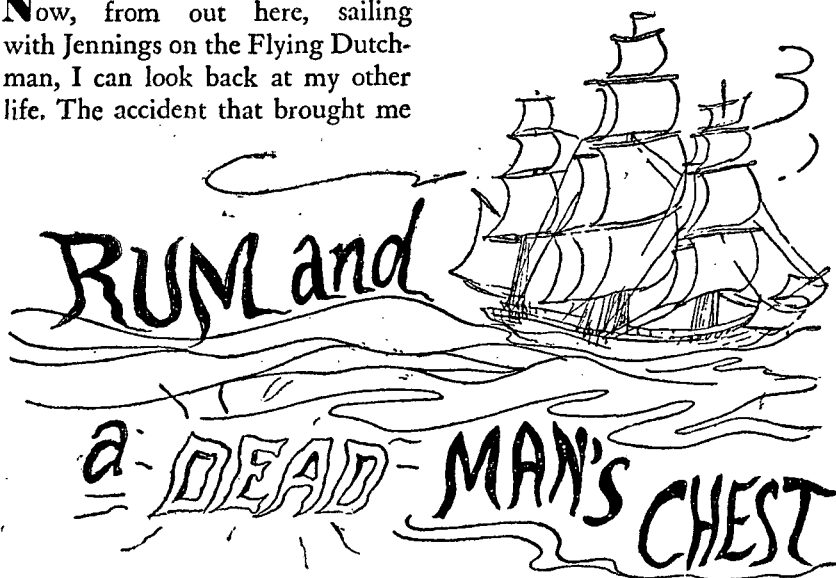
*Chauncey Moorehouse did this.
Address Apt. 2C, Hobart Arms,
Sixteenth and 3rd Avenue.*

It was in Virginia's flowery handwriting.



In this era of spatial and medical experimentation, refutation of the proverbial adage is, indeed, imminent.

Now, from out here, sailing with Jennings on the Flying Dutchman, I can look back at my other life. The accident that brought me



here took place on a converted C-3 while the Dolphin was serving as a freighter during the Vietnam war.

Simpson, the travel agent at the bank, had been the first to warn me this trip might be a bit rugged for an artist. So many old bottoms were

taken out of mothballs, pressed into shuttling supplies into the Mekong delta and Thailand—but I was going only as far as San Francisco.

I had four weeks coming at the printery. Each year the art department staff either took their vaca-

by Waldo Carlton Wright

tions or this time became meaningless, like a punched ribbon that runs out of a photocopier.

Karl, on the next drawing board, egged me on to take this trip. "Dash off a lot of character sketches aboard," he said. "We can make a book of them." I didn't miss his word, *we*.

Once I had put down my three-fifty deposit for the ticket, there followed five postponements of the sailing date. Simpson kept calling the New York office only to get a runaround about the ship being delayed in the Canal, held up unloading tapioca flour at Baltimore, stranded on a sand bar in the Delaware.

"Time's a-wasting," Karl kept reminding me. "Why not face it? You're not supposed to go, my ESP keeps telling me."

But I'm the stubborn type. Far enough back, some of my New England grandfathers must have been whalers. Peerless agreed to moving my vacation time back, and the travel agent kept pestering New York.

Then one afternoon in early December Simpson called me. I was in the dark room developing some film.

"You're to leave this Friday," he said. "Pick up your ticket in my office."

"Sail on Friday?" Karl was strip-

ping in a head on the sixteen-page layout. "You know any sailor would sooner be keelhauled than push off on a Friday."

At the time, excited about leaving, I never gave that another thought. It was only later, while our ship waited in the harbor at Cristobal, that I realized how right Karl had been.

Karl took the day off to drive me to New York. Passengers were to be picked up by the ship's limousine at the St. Regis. Karl parked around the block.

"You're the only passenger." The blue-capped driver spotted us when we carried the bags into the lobby. "Your friend can ride over with you as far as the Navy checkpoint if he wants to."

"I've got to have a look at your ship," Karl said. "It will make a great story to tell my grandchildren."

The ticket read Pier 34, but the driver headed the station wagon down the West Expressway, through the tunnel, to Bayonne.

"You'll have to wait here at the check-in point," the driver told Karl as he drew up beside a stubby brick building, flying a Navy flag.

"Where's the Dolphin?" I asked. The whale-like body of a sub was tied to the wharf. Beyond it loomed the hulk of a freighter.

"Maybe you're going by sub."

Karl had a weird sense of humor. "There's your ship," the driver said. He crossed the lane, passed the shore police and on to the red brick building.

"If that's your ship, she looks like something the Ancient Mariner sailed into port," Karl said. "Call it off, go back with me. We could ski for two weeks at Camel Back."

"Probably quite groovy aboard," I said, but I shared Karl's first impression.

"Wait over there on the steps for me," the blue-capped driver said to Karl. "I won't be long."

He headed the station wagon past a movable crane, pyramids of oil drums and stacked pipe, pulled up along a warehouse facing the wharf.

The rusty hull of the Dolphin was overhung with cables dangling from deck booms. Lift trucks shuffled cubes of crated containers. These they lowered on spreaders dangling from the cables. Winches whined, booms swung. The last of the cargo was being stowed amidships.

As I walked up the metal tread of the ladder, I had the odd impression I was moving into a trap, the old wire type that caught squirrels and weasels alive, the kind I baited as a Boy Scout. When the little animal ventures up the ramp a tread drops. There is no escape.

"Welcome aboard, sir," the stew-

ard said, saluting. He nodded to one of the sailors leaning over the rail, and the sailor picked up my bags and headed back to the companionway.

My stateroom was under the bridge, next to the captain's. There were two single beds along the walls, under the velvet-curtained portholes, with a shaggy rug between on the brown vinyl floor, a chest of drawers, mirror, a built-in wardrobe, lounge chair, door into the bath. Neat, but dismal, a man's hideaway.

I set out my typewriter on the table between the beds, unpacked my bags.

"Would you like a bottle of Scotch, sir?" Tersie, the sailor, asked. "I can get it from the steward."

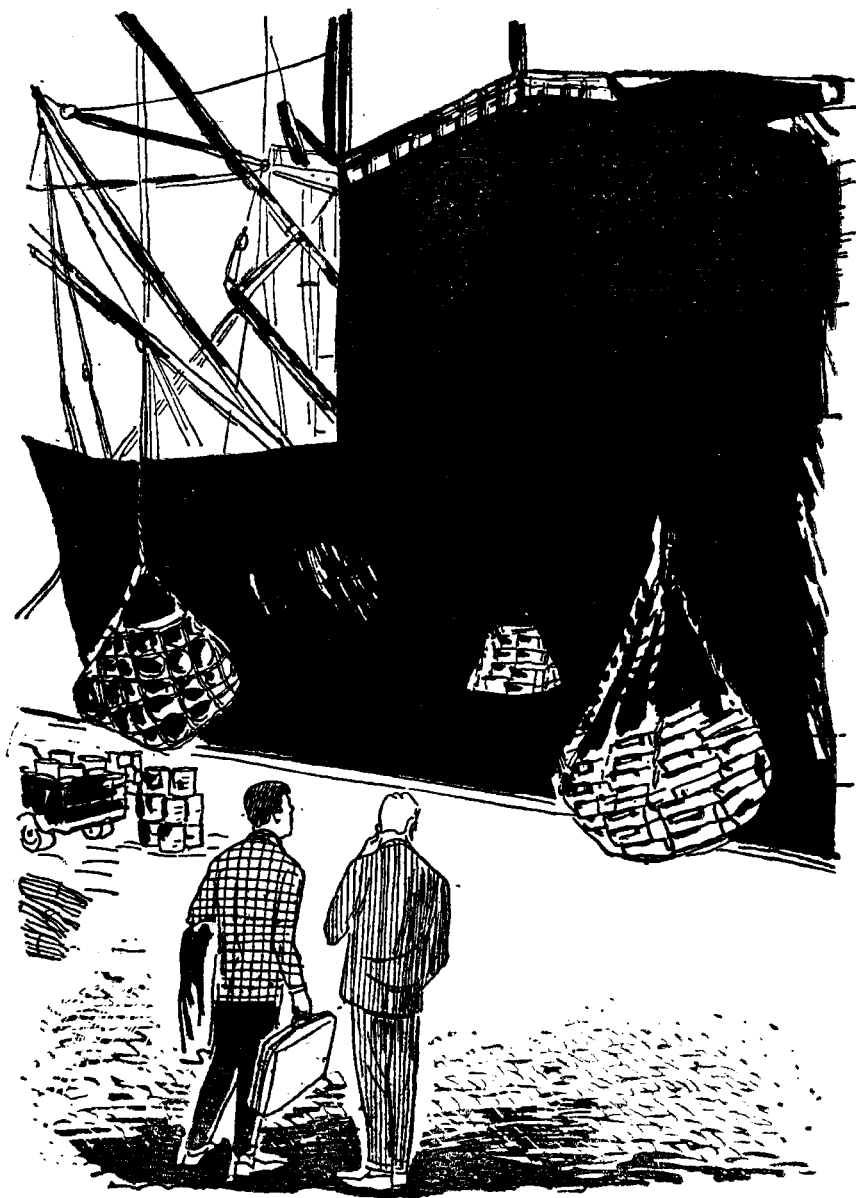
"No, thanks." I wanted to take a shower, rest before dinner.

While I dressed a three-note gong echoed in the companionway. Tersie stuck his head through the door. He was holding the gong in front of him like a tray.

"You follow me," he said.

Inside the messroom the ship's officers looked up from tables set along the bulkhead. Most of them had apparently just come off duty, no jackets, the necks of their shirts open.

"Captain say sit here." Tersie pulled back a chair.



The three officers, who had been scooping up their dessert, rose, nodded and hurried away.

I sat alone while Tersie served the canned soup, fruit cup and black coffee.

"Cook late coming aboard," he explained. "Better chow tomorrow."

The bean soup was so hot with black pepper I couldn't swallow it, but the lukewarm coffee washed away the sting of the pepper.

All of the officers had slipped away. Tersie stood by, eager to clear the table.

It was twilight when I went on deck. Two tugs were nosing the old freighter out the slip past the warehouses into the channel. Blue and white dots of lower New York's glass buildings formed a stage backdrop. Turbines whirled, tugs drew away and the Dolphin headed toward Ambrose Light. Overhead, the arch of the Verrazano Bridge shone with its red and green lights like a Christmas wreath.

Up on the bridge, through the glass, I could see the outline of the harbor pilot, his shoulder moving as he swung the ship along the line of buoys.

"So you're the only passenger." The voice so near startled me. One of the officers had stopped.

"Yes, Paul Gibson." I stuck out my hand. "I was beginning to think

no one would notice I was aboard."

"Everyone's on edge, on takeoff." The officer scratched a match head on the edge of his thumb to touch the bowl of his pipe. "Just came off duty in the engine room myself. Name's Jennings."

"What's the sweat about shoving off?"

"Well, it's the first time out for most of us on this converted Navy supply ship." Jennings took a deep draw on his pipe. "It's Friday, too."

"Seaworthy enough, isn't she?" I began to wonder about that.

He shrugged his shoulders. "Once we're rid of that bindle bundle."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, that's top secret, old boy," he said. His pipe had gone out and this time when he struck another match I saw how his mouth was drawn down, arched like a tragic mask.

"You're British, aren't you?"

"Then it still shows?" For the first time he laughed but it was more like a snort. "I thought I lost that in Burma."

"What were you doing in New York?" My question seemed impertinent but Burma didn't fit in.

"Seeing my agent, if you must know," he said. "Every limey hopes to become another Joe Conrad. Well, I have another watch coming up so must get some shut-eye. Be seeing you around."

The ship moved into a winter fog that blanked out the channel. I felt its chill, walked into the lounge. There was no one there. I found Alan Villiers' *The Way of a Ship* among the books in the mahogany case.

The noticeable roll of the Dolphin as she moved into deeper water, the long drive down from Springfield, the realization that at last I was on my way to the Coast, scrubbed out my earlier feeling of foreboding, of having walked into a trap.

I blundered down the dim companionway, not quite sure of the door to my stateroom. I opened several doors, only to hear deep snoring. Then, at the end of the companionway, the dome light shone in the ceiling of my room. Tersie had laid out my pajamas on the bed. He had even unpacked my electric razor, set it on the glass shaft of the small bath.

Hours later the breakfast gong sounded its three notes. I pulled back the curtain from the fore port-hole. It was still dark. The black flagstaff of the prow swung up and down like a pointer through the stars.

I made my way down the ladder to the messroom. I hadn't felt so hungry since Karl and I had been marooned in the Adirondacks during a blizzard. The same three offi-

cers sat at the table near the door. They rose as I came in, as if somehow I outranked them. Perhaps they were putting me on, having seen that word, *artist*, after my name.

"Sorry not to have been civil to you yesterday," Benson, the chief engineer, said. "Mister Jennings told me you're a fellow writer."

"No, a painter," I said.

"Shakedown on an old tub like this is rugged," Harris, the first mate, said. "Meet Briggs, the navigation officer."

"A lone passenger must be just another headache for you," I said.

"Not at all," Benson said. "By the way, the captain asked me to invite you for cocktails in the lounge at four."

Suddenly I felt I belonged on the Dolphin, among new friends.

On deck the winter rain beat in my face. I retreated into the lounge, tried to read Alan Villiers, lost interest. I tried spinning the dial of the radio but picked up only some calypso band. The stooped old radio operator shuttled back and forth from his radio room to the captain's quarters. Each time he nodded but did not stop to chat.

After lunch Tersie stuck his head through the door. "Captain Woolget expecting you in the lounge," he said.

Just to play host to one lone pas-

senger, the officers had set out quite a spread—trays of caviar, platters of Danish pastry, bowls of olives—and Tersie was tending bar.

Captain Woolget came forward to shake my hand, as if I were a VIP from Washington.

"Always a pleasure to have an artist aboard," he said. My travel agent had added that detail, not quite sure what my job was at Peerless.

"Just a dabbler," I said.

He introduced me around. "Most of us have never been on the Dolphin before," he explained. "It takes a little doing to get everything running shipshape."

"It's strange finding oneself the only passenger," I said. "Not quite what I expected from the line's brochure."

"Five more passengers will join us at Cristobal. One's a Miss Durell, daughter of the French ambassador to Panama."

Benson, the chief engineer, joined us.

Tersie kept filling our glasses. One by one the officers drifted away, to the engine room, to inspect hatches, to the bridge.

That was the way it was for the next four days. Either I was surrounded by officers or alone. They all seemed edgy about something that had to be done and done right, before the ship could really get un-

der way with its cargo of war supplies for Vietnam.

That night, voices on deck, near the side porthole, brought me awake. I tried to switch on the bedside lamp but the power was off. With the turbines not turning over, the Dolphin was drifting. Then came the low screeching of a cable in rusted sheaves and distant plops as something dropped into the sea.

"Good riddance to bad rubbish," a voice said.

"Long as the drums can be handled with spreader and winch, no problem," another deckhand said.

"I heard one of the drums had a hole punched in it while it was being lowered into the hold."

The voices drifted away. The table light came on. Turbines throbbed. The Dolphin was again under way.

What had been dumped overboard and why at this stage of the voyage? Alan Villiers' book didn't give me any answers.

The next afternoon the Dolphin passed through the rim of mist that marked the Gulf Stream. I was lounging in a deck chair renewing my faded summer tan when Jennings came by. The young engineer was on his way to the automatic laundry. His stride was jaunty to offset his embarrassment at being caught on a job that, as a Londoner, he would have assigned to his valet.

Once he put his bundle in the machine, he came back and slipped into the next chair.

"Found anything worth sketching?" he asked.

"Something more puzzling." I told him about what I had overheard under the porthole last night.

"The crew aren't supposed to know what that was." He had a way of raising his eyebrows like a startled child.

"Or the passengers?" I asked. "I should have guessed when I saw that sub tied up to the wharf, a tarpaulin over the conning tower."

"Everyone's entitled to his own opinion." Jennings rose and walked into the laundry, ever the stiff-lipped Britisher.

I didn't like the idea of having been subjected to the risk of one of those drums leaking, irradiating the food in the hold. The more I thought over what the deckhands had said, the angrier I got.

Captain Woolget was sitting back of his desk, leafing through a manifesto. "Mister Gibson," he said, "I see you're enjoying your deck chair."

I told him what I had overheard.

"That's all behind us, Mister Gibson," he said, picking up his cap and rising. "Some outmoded electronic gear the Navy wanted buried. Now if you'll excuse me."

The Dolphin was logging off more knots, plowing through the

pond-still sea. The next few days passed quickly with boat drill, platter-size steaks, sunbathing, talking with the Danish bo'sun who nursemaided a crew chipping and painting the superstructure. Evenings I usually lost a few bucks in the cribbage games in the messroom.

I had escaped into a clean world of water and sun, out of the cement jungle, away from the whirr of offset presses and the depressing smell of wet paper and black ink.

Late the fifth evening, the Dolphin slid into the harbor at Cristobal, dropped anchor. For an hour nothing happened. Officers and crew waited for the five passengers. They were driving over from Balboa to come aboard, Sparks had told me when he dropped in after dinner. He needed a roll of film for his camera, to get some night shots on Gatun Lake.

From across the bay a patrol craft putted alongside. Three Navy officers hurried up the accommodation ladder, disappeared in the captain's lounge.

Soon, over the intercom came the captain's voice. "Now hear this, hear this. All officers and passengers report at once to the lounge."

When I walked in, Jennings was seated in a lounge chair. He had pulled off his shirt and a Navy medic was bent over him, running a probe over the young engineer's

chest. A Navy lieutenant commander sat at a table, papers spread out from his portmanteau.

"All ship officers strip to the waist."

An ensign stood at the elbow of the medic, writing down the readings on the calibrated scintillator. Beads of sweat glistened on his upper lip.

"How many more readings have we got to get for confirmation?" the medic called over to the lieutenant commander.

Captain Woolget walked in, began to unbutton his jacket.

"That won't be necessary, Captain," the commander said, rising. "Stand by for further orders, after we make out the report."

The three Navy officers saluted; the captain turned and left. Young Jennings slipped his shirt back over his head and the officers buttoned their jackets. They were exchanging knowing looks.

"One of those damned deckhands must have—" Benson said.

Captain Woolget broke in, "All officers will stand by for further orders. Have the crew retire to quarters, once the Panamanian crew comes aboard."

Sparks had explained that movement of all ships through the Canal was carried out by a crew from the Canal Zone. He added we'd be lucky to pass through at night,

avoid the sweltering heat of the day, so near the equator.

I went up the ladder to the deck aft of the bridge for a clearer view of the entrance to the Canal. A giant green arrow marked the first lock where the Dolphin would be raised to the level of Gatun Lake.

Our crew huddled on the quarter-deck watching the Navy patrol craft head back to base, her flag flapping. An LCVP with the Panamanian crew aboard was heading toward us. When within hailing distance, a muffled order blared from the CP's megaphone. The LCVP swung about, chugged slowly back to shore. Something had gone wrong, horribly wrong, inside the Dolphin.

I caught sight of Jennings standing at the head of the ladder to the lower deck. "What goes?" I asked.

He turned, then seeing me, began shaking his head. "What a bloody break. Now I'll never finish my book."

"What do you mean, never?"

"You'll know soon enough."

"You mean our ship picked up too much of the hot stuff?"

"All of us, too," he said quietly. "One of the damned drums must have leaked into the hold. Why did it have to happen to us?"

"We're all radioactive?"

"The medic said I have picked up stray isotopes at a rate that would kill a whale in six months. You saw

how eager they were to get away to save their own hides, the yellow-bellied brass."

"What will they do with us?" Premonitions were beginning to make my head throb. I glanced at my watch and saw it had stopped at six.

The intercom ended our suspense. "Now hear this, hear this. This is port commander, Captain Warrington. The Dolphin with all personnel aboard will clear this harbor, without delay. Proceed under full steam to Guantanamo Bay for further orders."

Anchor up, the Dolphin swung around, headed northeast. Once under way, Captain Woolget called another meeting in the lounge of all officers not on duty.

"You might as well come too, Gibson," he said as he brushed past me in the companionway. "You're in this with us."

Tight-lipped, the officers stood sullen and angry, facing the captain.

"No need to tell you what has happened, gentlemen," he said. "Even the food in the reefers is radioactive, contaminated. We'll all be taken ashore at Guantanamo, hospitalized. The Dolphin will be towed out to deep water, scuttled."

"What can they do for us, Captain?" young Jennings asked. "The medic said the plutonium's already replaced half the calcium in my

bones. Likely true for everyone.

"No need to panic, Jennings. The captain's voice was hard-edged but I had a feeling he was just as scared as any of us.

"No hint of this must reach the crew, before we are taken off," the captain said. "Pass the word to the officers you replace on watch."

Down in the messroom the cribbage game began, ran for high stakes until dawn.

I watched Benson, the first engineer, drink bottle after bottle of milk from the galley. Most of us settled for Scotch from the steward's pantry. Tersie cut up bowls of cheese. Anything to combat the deadly rays that were filtering from the hold, into our marrow.

By morning the messroom deck was littered with broken glass from empty bottles the officers had smashed on the bulkhead as they won or lost.

I staggered on deck to spot the first lights of Guantanamo. Soon spouted from the Dolphin funnel. Probably another boiler tube had blown out under the forced draft.

Dead ahead rode a torpedo destroyer, convoying us through the morning fog. Suddenly the curtain of haze lifted.

Jennings had joined me at the rail. He expected it would take at least a year before any of us would be released from sick bay; the lucky

ones, that is, who would walk out.

Then, wallowing through the Gulf, I made out the grim hull of a battleship, bearing down on us.

"Good God, they can't do that," Jennings said, grabbing the rail to steady himself.

The battleship swung her hull past the torpedo destroyer, drawing parallel not over five hundred yards off our starboard bow.

On the bridge, Captain Woolget was waving a megaphone in a voiceless protest. I could see the little men in white at their battle stations as they swung the turrets toward us. The muzzles of the sixteen-inch guns were trained on our stricken ship.

"Here comes the first one," Jennings called. "Duck."

The shell struck amidships, plowed through the turbines. The shock knocked me into the scuppers. The Dolphin listed. It reminded me of the way a buck deer drops when a magnum bullet strikes his shoulder.

The second shot sheared off the bridge. Deep inside, an oil tank let go. A splinter of steel cut across my

forehead, and I slid into the sea.

The crew were screaming and cursing, jumping from the quarterdeck, all around me. At the third roar, I knew the Navy had no intention of lowering lifeboats or dropping rubber rafts.

The Dolphin was sinking, prow down, drawing all of us after her, all smeared with the radioactive sludge from the atomic-powered sub.

This way there would be no Congressional investigation, no public hysteria. Just another old freighter lost somewhere in the Windward Passage, with all aboard, the telegram to next of kin would add pointedly.

Now, out here, sailing on the Flying Dutchman, Jennings and I are writing the manuscript about what happened to the Dolphin—just another old freighter in Davy Jones' Locker.

Somehow we never get the report written. One of my seafaring grandfathers once told me how it was. Dead men tell no tales, especially dead radioactive men. They just disintegrate.



Prudence is a difficult lady to court with equable success.



said, I'm told he's a nice guy—o was.

I was a steelworker when I me Gwen, and I was pulling down : nice salary, but I worried ever time I walked out on a beam. wanted something safe, and Gwer

CAUTIOUS MAN

WHEN I got back from Atlanta, it took neither a great effort nor a sharp brain to realize that Gwen had told somebody all about my little trip. The sketches, the maps, the plans were there on the corner table in the bedroom, where somebody had seen them—and I knew who.

Bundy.

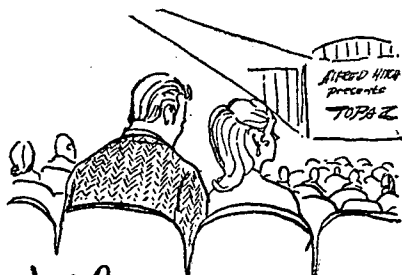
He's a nice guy, I'm told. He's about my build, which is big, he looks something like me, and he takes care of Gwen whenever I'm away. Exactly how he takes care of her I never wanted to know. That's Gwen's business, not mine. As I

and I talked it over and decided on burglary. The risk is small, the take has no limits, and it's tax free. Besides, while I go out on two or three jobs a year, the rest of the time I can sit home and practice the fiddle. I love music, but I'm a better burglar than a musician. And after all, you have to make money

When I'm on the job I carry a gun, but I never used it. Murder is definitely not my line. Too risky—until now.

I realized exactly what I was up against if I killed Bundy. The police investigation would turn up Gwen's name, and the cops would swarm down on us. They'd know, and there was no sense kidding myself about that. They'd know all right, but could they prove it?

I decided to consult George. He's



by Lawrence
Treat

the smart, friendly little attorney who's always hanging around us. We take him out to dinner sometimes, and he sits there and eats and drinks and says so little that Gwen and I forget he's even there. He advises us on how to place our money at a high yield and in a way that can't be traced. He gets a big

cut and I'm probably his chief means of support, which is why I trust him. I have the dough, and he needs me.

I told him exactly what I was going to do. He agreed to alibi me, and we went over every detail of what we'd say. Besides that, I pumped him thoroughly on the laws of search and arrest. I learned exactly when to talk and what to tell, and when to shut up. I was ready. All I had to do was go out and kill Bundy.

I never met Bundy or even spoke to him after I got that first glimpse of him, but the idea hit me before he could even turn around. He was crossing a parking lot behind the supermarket, and I'd just stepped out of the car. I ducked fast and I said to Gwen, "Look."

She looked. As far as I'm concerned, when she turns those deep violet eyes of hers in my direction, even if I'm a block away I tremble and my throat gets dry and I head for her in a short, straight line. That's Gwen for you; or for me, at any rate.

Bundy, however, didn't turn a hair. He kept on walking to wherever he was going. I stayed out of sight and began circling the car on my hands and knees.

"Who is he?" Gwen asked. "A cop?"

"No." I was thinking fast. Puzzled, Gwen said, "He looks something like you, what of it?"

"Talk to him," I said. "Find out who he is. I have an idea."

Gwen stared at me as if I were an imbecile. "Are you out of your mind?" she said. "And the way you're crouching—some kids will see you and think you're Tarzan, and then what?"

"Talk to him," I said, and tried to make myself smaller.

Gwen smiled and contrived to look helpless. Bundy was only fifteen feet away, and she said in a pitiful voice, "Oh—I've lost my car keys!"

Bundy stopped and looked at her, and when you look at Gwen, you're hooked. She was Miss America and Miss Universe for four years running—or would have been if she'd bothered entering. Her hair is gold, her eyes are amethyst and her voice is pearly. She could have modeled for all the Greek and Roman statues that are dug up in the Mediterranean region and called masterpieces, and then they'd really have been masterpieces.

So Bundy stopped. "Can I help?"

"I've lost my keys," Gwen said again, "and I don't know how I'll ever get home."

"Can I take you?" he asked.

Gwen melted him down to soft

jelly. "Would you? I live over in Bayside."

A smart girl, Gwen. She didn't know what I had in mind, but she had sense enough not only to give him a wrong address, but to steer him over to the opposite end of town.

I watched them drive off. She was chattering away gaily and he had control of the car, but not much else. I wondered whether to stay in the parking lot or go home. I went home.

Gwen arrived about an hour later. "His name is Bundy Emerson," she said, "and he's sweet. He lives with his married sister and he works as a salesman for a roofing company and he wants to take me to the movies. Why did you want me to talk to him? He does *not* look like you."

"He does in the dark," I said. "Suppose the next time I go out on a job, some little thing goes wrong and the cops come here and question me. My alibi is that I went to a movie with you, and I'll be able to prove it. I'll remember every bit of it—you'll have told me, of course. And it will so happen that you lost a glove or something and called the usher to help find it, and he'll remember me. He'll remember a big guy that he half saw in the dark. And for that matter, what male ever really looks

at me whenever you are around?"

"They look at your size, and they stay away."

"Exactly. They remember my size, and so will the usher."

Gwen smiled. "I think you're a genius."

"I hope so," I said. "And now let's take another look at the paper and list the houses that are going to be open on that next Historic House Tour."

That's how we operate. When the historic mansions are open to the public, Gwen goes. She knows what to look for, and she has a photographic memory. Later on she sketches the layout for me and tells me every detail of what she saw. After we decide which house is worth visiting and what I'm going to take, I prowls around it for a few nights, to make friends with the dog and get some idea of the habits of the household. When I'm sure of myself, I go to work.

As I remarked before, I don't like to take risks. Call me Caspar Milquetoast if you want, but I've never been caught burglarizing and I don't expect to be. With Bundy for an alibi, though, I can prove my whereabouts, which is what I call playing it safe.

On those tours of the mansions, five dollars a person for the benefit of the local hospital fund, the owners of the houses, or rather

their wives, act as hostesses. They put on their best frocks and their finest jewelry, and they conduct the visitors in groups of ten or fifteen and say things like, "This is a cute little teapot, isn't it? Sterling, of course. Paul Revere made it for my great-great-great-grandfather. I do hope I have the right number of greats. It's been in my family ever since, and they say it's quite beyond price. Now this chair . . ."

The trouble is, though, that you can't sell a Paul Revere. At least *I* can't. So I take the cute little teapot and wake up my hostess and say, "Lady, I got your Paul Revere. Give me your diamonds and whatever else you got in the safe, and it's a deal."

They're glad to. And the funny thing is, these great dames always seem to have separate bedrooms, with their husbands out of earshot because the guys snore—or that's what the wives tell me, anyhow.

As you see, I've got a nice little thing going, but you can't keep working the same territory, and Gwen couldn't keep dropping her glove in the movies. So we talked it over and decided to spread ourselves around. Six towns, three years.

Here's how we'd do it. Gwen and I would find out when and where the house tours were sched-

uled, and we'd go there. I'd stay put in a motel, and Gwen would take the tour and make notes. We'd study them that night and we'd put down whatever further questions we wanted answered, and we'd research them for the next few days. Then we'd go home.

A few months later I'd drive out there, and again I'd put up at a motel. When I was set, I'd steal a car for the night and I'd go to work, masked and with a fake beard. Couldn't be safer.

Meanwhile, Gwen would be setting up my alibi, with Bundy for a stand-in. She'd run tapes of my fiddle-playing, so that neighbors and tradesmen would assume I was practicing my violin, as I usually did. They'd see, at a distance or in the dark, a big guy who looked like me. Whatever else Gwen did was up to her. I didn't ask. I wanted an alibi, and she supplied it. Frankly, it never occurred to me to be jealous.

The Atlanta job went fine, and I cleared twenty grand. Part of it was in cash, and part in jewels that I had no trouble fencing. I had fifteen thousand dollars' worth of securities, but I figured they could be traced to me and it was risky to dispose of them. I burned them up and pulverized the ashes; no unnecessary chances, that's me. Then I found out that Bundy knew

everything about my operations.

I didn't discuss the matter with Gwen. It was obvious that he'd been here and that he'd either found some of the sketches, which should have been destroyed, or else that he'd forced her to show them. His next step would be blackmail. He'd ask for a few thousand at a time, and he'd never give up. I had to protect myself from him. Even if he didn't put on the pressure, Gwen had gone too far with him. This time, I was jealous.

I spent the next couple of days walking up and down corridors in loft buildings, looking around. I found exactly what I wanted on the third floor of the Triangle Building: an empty loft, next to a metal-working shop where there was enough clatter to drown out a minor noise like a gunshot.

I called Bundy, told him I was representing a co-op out in the valley and that we needed some roofing work. I said we were temporarily located in Room 305, Triangle Building, and could he come there tomorrow at two. Don't mind if the place looked empty, I told him; we were still moving in.

He came. He took a curious look at me, and he was still looking when I shot. Considering the fact that I'd never fired a gun before

in my life, I did pretty well. Even at three feet, some people miss. I didn't.

I made sure he was dead, and then I walked out, down the stairs and out to the street. Nobody saw me and I dropped my gun in the river. Except for the fact that the police would dig up his association with Gwen, I was free and clear.

Yet I had a bad night of it, worrying about the police. While it would be pretty hard for them to prove that I was in Room 305 and fired the shot that killed Bundy, police are not dumb. Despite my alibi, they'd know I was the man, and they'd make it tough for me.

I got up early the next morning and went down to the corner for the paper. The murder item was

on the second page. It stated that the body of one B. W. Emerson had been found in an empty loft in the Triangle Building. Mr. Emerson had been shot twice, through the head. His boss said that Mr. Emerson was a likeable man with no known enemies, and was due for a promotion. He and his wife had just returned a couple of days ago from a two-week honeymoon in the Caribbean. The police admitted that they had no clues.

I read the article twice, and then the truth dawned on me. Bundy had never been at the house at all, Gwen probably hadn't seen him in years, I'd never had an alibi for my burglaries, and I certainly had none that I could rely on for yesterday afternoon. The only thing that was perfectly clear was, now I had to go out and kill George.



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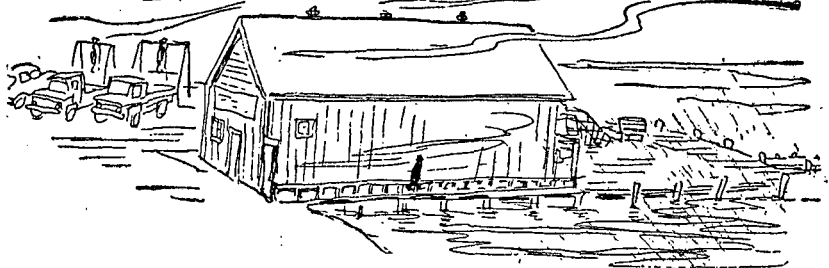
I want to thank all of you for your interest.

Most sincerely,

Pat Hitchcock

Good fortune is often ascribed to being opportunely situated at the propitious moment—but time can be singularly impatient.

A COLD DAY IN NOVEMBER



BODEGA BAY is a small fishing village on the Northern California coast, some sixty-five miles above San Francisco. The village, the good-sized inlet of the same name, and a complex of several buildings called The Tides, achieved somewhat of a national prominence a few years ago when Alfred Hitchcock filmed his suspense movie, *The Birds*, there. Since then, they get a good deal of tourist business in the spring and summer months—sightseers, vacationers, visitors

from the outlying towns, self-styled fishermen who boast to the bored party boat captains about the record king salmon they are going to catch but never do—but during the winter, the natives usually have the place pretty much to themselves, and it takes on, falsely, the atmosphere of a staid, aloof New England seacoast hamlet.

There were only three cars parked in the lot around which The Tides is built when I pulled

in there on a cold, gray Monday morning in mid-November. The fog, which perpetually shrouds Bodega Bay this time of year, was almost like rain.

I parked in one of the diagonal slots at the far end, directly in front of the Wharf Bar and Restaurant. A chill wind, laced with wet needles of fog, stung my face when I stepped out, and I turned the collar on my overcoat up against it and pulled the brim of my hat lower. I stood there for a moment, shivering, then looked in through the windows at the interior

area to the left. Wooden tables used for cleaning and packaging took up the length of the wall along one side; the rest of the oblong expanse was cluttered with large squarish carts with oversized metal wheels, small dollies, stacks of wooden pallets, rows of storage lockers, two large refrigerator units, a large scale, and a lot of exposed, white-painted water piping. The odor of fish and salt water hung heavily.

At the far end, a young man wearing sneakers, a pair of once-white dungarees and a well-worn



A Novelette by Bill Fonzini

of the restaurant. Only two of the burnished copper-topped tables were occupied, and there was no one at the short bar. I wondered if they made enough during the winter to warrant staying open, but then I supposed they did or they would have closed.

Just past the windows, an open archway led inside the building. I went through it, moving past the round cement tanks, empty now, in which shellfish are kept fresh, and stepped into a long warehouse

sweatshirt was washing down the concrete floor with a hose. I went down to him. As I approached, he turned, releasing the hand shut-off on the hose. He had brown eyes and a shock of brown hair combed down low over his forehead in the current collegiate fashion. Across the front of his sweatshirt, in cardinal-red lettering, was printed *Stanford*.

The description I had been given matched him well enough, and the sweatshirt made it fairly con-

clusive. Timothy Culhane had told me the week before that his son, Mark, and Steve Litchik had attended Stanford University in Palo Alto together, and a mutual acquaintance of theirs I had found in San Francisco had told me that the two of them had come up here to Bodega Bay to work the salmon boats.

I stopped and said, "Steve Litchik?"

He gave me an appraising look. His brown eyes were slightly wary, as if he thought I was going to try to sell him insurance. "That's right."

I gave my name and what I did, and then I said, "I understand you're a friend of Mark Culhane."

A frown knit his eyebrows. "Yes?"

"Can you tell me where Mark is?"

"What do you want with him?"

"His parents would like to know his whereabouts," I said. "It seems they haven't heard from him since August, when he told them he was coming north with you."

The frown deepened. "That's kind of odd," he said. "Mark was always pretty close to his family. He used to contact them about once a month or so."

"Uh huh," I said. "Now, can you tell me where I might find him?"

"I don't know where he is."

"He's not here in Bodega Bay now?"

Litchik shook his head. "He left about a month and a half ago."

"He didn't tell you where he was going?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"He left sort of suddenly."

"How do you mean?"

"Well, he was here one day and then the next he was gone," Litchik said.

"Did you talk to him at all prior to his leaving?"

"The afternoon before. We had a beer together."

"And he didn't say anything about it to you?"

"No, nothing."

"Didn't that strike you as being a little strange when you found out he'd gone?" I asked. "You were friends, after all."

"A little, I guess," Litchik answered. "But Mark was sort of impulsive, you know? If he got something into his head about taking off, then he'd just do it. That was the way he was about things."

I nodded. "How did he seem to you that previous afternoon? Was he excited? Nervous? Anything that might have indicated he was expecting to leave?"

"No. He was the way he always was."

I lighted a cigarette, put the match in my pocket. "What about his belongings?" I asked. "Did he take them all with him?"

"I don't know."

"You didn't room together?"

"No," Litchik said. "We did for a while when we first got here, in August. But then Mark sort of took up with this Sherry Davidian and he moved up there."

I thought that over. "He was living with a girl?"

"No, no," Litchik said. "I didn't mean that. Sherry's parents own a boardinghouse up on the hill. They had a room vacant, and I guess Mark wanted to be near her. He spent all of his free time with her."

"I see," I said. "Why is it you didn't move with him, Steve?"

"The rooms up there are only big enough for one," Litchik said, "and they just had a single vacancy."

"How did you feel about Mark's moving?"

He shrugged. "It didn't matter to me one way or the other."

"Did you and Mark share expenses before?"

"Yes."

"Well, didn't that put an extra burden on you, having to pay full rent?"

"Oh, I guess it did, somewhat," Litchik answered. "But they don't

charge you much for rent up here, and food is reasonable."

"Did the two of you still pal around together after he moved into the boardinghouse?"

"When he wasn't with Sherry," Litchik said. A hint of what might have been annoyance touched his eyes. "Listen, what are you getting at?"

I decided to drop it. "Nothing," I said. I looked around for a place to put out my cigarette. I didn't want to use the floor after he had just finished hosing it down.

Litchik saw that, and a faint smile lifted the corners of his mouth. "Go ahead," he said. "I've got to go over it again anyway."

I returned his smile, dropped the cigarette and put my heel to it. When I looked up, I saw that the trace of annoyance had disappeared from his eyes. I asked, "Can you tell me where Mark worked, Steve?"

"When we first got here, he hired on as a deckhand on one of the commercial salmon trollers."

"Which one?"

"The *Kingfisher*," Litchik said. "Andy Michaelis' boat."

"Where can I find this Michaelis?"

"Over at the slips on the other side of the bay. He's usually tied up there, and one of the fellows told me earlier that he'd seen Mich-

aelis over there, making repairs. There's a road a few miles up that swings around to Bodega Head."

I nodded. "How long did Mark work for Michaelis?"

"Just until the end of the season."

"And then?"

"He did odd jobs for Guido Rigazzo, at the Rigazzo Fish Company."

"Where's that?"

"About a mile this side of the end of the bay," Litchik said. "You'll see it as you go up the highway."

I chewed thoughtfully at my lower lip. "Did you ask any of the people you mentioned if they knew where Mark had gone?"

"Sure," he answered, "as soon as I found out he'd left. But none of them knew, either."

"How did you find out, by the way?"

"Mr. Rigazzo called me here on the morning after Mark left. He wanted to know if I knew where he was, because he hadn't reported to work."

"How did Sherry Davidian take Mark's going away?"

"She was pretty shook up," he said. "I think she was in love with Mark, and it hurt her that he went off the way he did."

"Was Mark in love with Sherry,

do you think? Really in love?"

"From the way he acted, I thought he was. But I guess he couldn't have been, could he?"

"That's a good question."

I asked Steve directions to the Davidian boardinghouse, and thanked him for his time. Just before I turned to go, he said, "Listen, you don't think anything's happened to Mark, do you? I mean, I didn't think too much about his leaving so unexpectedly at the time, even though I was a little pushed. But now that you've told me Mark hasn't been in touch with his folks since then . . ."

There was what I was sure was genuine concern in his eyes. I tried a reassuring smile. "Let's hope not, Steve."

"Will you let me know if you find out anything?"

"Count on it."

"Thanks." He moistened his lips, and I thought he was going to say something else, but he just opened the shut-off on the hose and began to spray the floor again. I wasn't sure, but I thought his shoulders had a slight slump to them that had not been in evidence when I first approached.

I left him and walked over to the warehouse entrance to the bar-and-restaurant. My feet felt as if I had been walking in wet snow for some time, and I could feel a chill

across my neck, even with the heavy overcoat. I had not eaten breakfast before driving up from San Francisco, and a cup of hot coffee and a sandwich seemed a very good idea at the moment. It was almost noon by my watch.

I sat at one of the tables inside and ordered a grilled ham-and-cheese and black coffee from an elderly, smiling waitress. She brought the coffee right away and I sipped at it and smoked a cigarette and did a little thinking. I didn't resolve much.

The sandwich came and I ate it and drank a refill on the coffee. My feet had warmed up some, and the chill was gone from my neck. I left a fifty-cent tip for the waitress and paid the tired-looking bartender for my lunch, then went out and got into my car again.

I started it up and sat there for a moment, then drove through the lot, up onto Highway 29, and turned north.

The Rigazzo Fish Company was a long, narrow, red-roofed building that extended out a good distance into the bay. A weathered gray sign confirmed the name, and that Guido Rigazzo was owner and proprietor. There were a couple of ancient, corroded hoists off to one side of the gravel parking lot, two well-traveled pickups angled in beside them, and a dusty green

sedan, vintage 1950, parked nearest the highway.

I parked my car and went up to the building. I tried the door but found it was locked so I went around to the side where there was a narrow catwalk that followed the side of the building. I walked along there, looking down at the gray water churning against the pilings, and came out onto a flat dock. A short wooden pier in pretty bad disrepair was attached to it, jutting sixty or seventy yards into the bay. A lone salmon troller was tied up at the end of it.

A tall, blond-haired kid in a plaid jacket and rubber boots was doing something to a fisherman's net near the open entrance to the red-roofed building. I crossed to him and asked where I might find Guido Rigazzo.

"In his office, probably."

"Where's that?"

"Inside. On your left."

"Thanks," I said. I went in through the open corrugated doors. The warehouse was cluttered with much the same as I had seen at The Tides, except that there was more of it. A bank of machinery, with a crisscross of conveyor belts, took up a portion of one wall at the upper end, and there was a large wire cage with a padlock on its wood-framed door that had a lot of crates stacked inside. On

my left was an enclosure that would be the office.

I knocked on the door, and a hoarse voice asked, "What is it?"

I opened the door and looked in. A short, bearish man in a tan wind-breaker sat behind a paper-cluttered desk, an open ledger in front of him and a pencil hooked over his right ear. He was thick-featured and olive-complected, and his blue-black hair was a snarl of pomaded ringlets. He looked up at me with eyes that were sea green, flecked with bits of yellow; they had an almost electric quality to them, and I had the foolish thought that when he was angry, sparks would fly from them like an exposed high-tension wire.

I said, "Mr. Rigazzo?"

"Yeah?"

"I wonder if I could speak to you for a moment."

"What about?"

"One of your former employees."

"Which one?"

"Mark Culhane," I said.

He closed the ledger, leaning back in his chair. "What's your interest in him?"

"I've been hired to find him. I'm a licensed private investigator," I said, and told him my name, and where I was from.

He said, "Who was it hired you?"

I didn't particularly care for his

questioning attitude. "Does that really matter, Mr. Rigazzo?"

"No, no, it don't matter," he said quickly and gave me a half-apologetic smile. "Just wondering is all. Is the kid in some kind of trouble?"

"Not that I know of," I said. I couldn't see any harm in telling him who my clients were. "Mark's parents retained me to look for him. They haven't heard from him in over three months, and they're naturally pretty worried."

"Oh. Well, yeah, I can understand that."

"I'd appreciate any help you could give me."

"There ain't much I can tell you."

"You don't have any idea where he might have gone?"

He moved his heavy shoulders. "Where do kids go these days? They spend a little time someplace, and then they move on like—what do you call them?"

"Nomads," I said.

"Yeah, like nomads."

"When was the last time you saw Mark, Mr. Rigazzo?"

"Second of last month, I think it was. When he quit for the day."

I thought about that. I took my wallet from the inside pocket of my suit coat, opened it and looked at the pocket calendar I keep in one of the plastic inserts. "The second was a Wednesday," I said.

"That's right. On a Wednesday."

"Uh huh." I shifted my feet.

"How often do you pay your employees, Mr. Rigazzo?"

That got a frown out of him.

"Once a week," he said. "Why?"

"What day?"

"Friday."

"Then Mark had three days' pay coming for that week. Did he ask you for it Wednesday night?"

"No," Rigazzo said. "Why should he have?"

"It stands to reason that if he was planning to leave that night he'd want his money, don't you think?"

Rigazzo licked at his lips. "I never thought about that." He took a short, greenish-colored cigar from inside his desk somewhere and began to unwrap it slowly. "Maybe he hadn't decided to leave when I last seen him. Maybe he got it into his head later on."

"Maybe," I said. "Did Mark do or say anything that day to indicate he was going away?"

"No," Rigazzo said. "I was kind of surprised when he didn't come on Thursday morning, because he always got here right on time. I called that friend of his, Steve something, works down at The Tides. He didn't know where the Culane kid had got off to, either."

"What did you do then?"

"What could I do? When he

didn't show up Friday, either, I figured he'd taken off the way they do, and that was the end of it."

I nodded. "How long did Mark work for you, Mr. Rigazzo?"

"About three weeks."

"Would you mind telling me what his duties were?"

"Cleaning up, running errands, things like that."

"You were satisfied with his work, I take it?"

"Sure," Rigazzo said. "He done a good job."

"He liked being around boats, I understand."

"That's what he told me when I put him on."

"Did he appear to be happy here, then?"

"I guess he did, yeah."

"Then there weren't any difficulties here that might have influenced him to leave? At least, none that you know about?"

He shook his head. "We got along just fine."

"All right, Mr. Rigazzo," I said. "I appreciate your time, and I won't take up any more of it."

He got on his feet and put out his hand. I took it. He said, "Listen, I hope you find him all right."

"So do I, Mr. Rigazzo."

"Anything else I can do, you let me know."

"Thank you, I'll do that."

I went out into the warehouse

again, and through the corrugated iron doors onto the dock. The blond-haired kid was still fiddling with the fisherman's net. I walked around to the catwalk and along it to the gravel lot in front.

The sky was very black now, and the wind was up. It wouldn't be long before the rains came.

The road that wound around the northern lip of the bay to Bodega Head was relatively new and in good condition, but I drove slowly; the fog was thicker on this side and visibility was not good.

When I came abreast of the boat slips I pulled my car off onto the shoulder, got out and crossed over there. I stepped up onto the ramp leading out, walking with my head bowed and my hands thrust deep into the pockets of my overcoat, feeling the icy wind numb my cheeks. My eyes began to water, and I had to stop once and clear them with a handkerchief.

There were only a couple of commercial boats anchored in the slips; the sound of them rubbing and banging against the board floats was almost lost in the sibilant howl of the wind. It didn't look like anyone was around, and I wondered if maybe Steve Litchik had been mistaken about this fellow Michaelis being here. It seemed to me to be a very bad day for making repairs of any kind.

I had almost reached the end of the ramp when I noticed movement on one of the boats in the end slip on my right. I moved to the edge and squinted there, shielding my eyes against the probing wind; I could just make out the markings on the starboard gunwale of the troller—*Kingfisher*, and below that, *Bodega Bay*.

I climbed down a short metal ladder onto the swaying float and made my way carefully to the end slip. A tall, well-muscled guy, wearing only a thin T-shirt and denim trousers, was kneeling on the troller's deck; his too-long hair fanned out in the wind behind him like a horse's mane at full gallop. He had the engine housing up, and there was an open tool box beside him with an assortment of wrenches laid out on a strip of canvas. I had a view of the engine but I couldn't see what he was doing to it.

I stepped up close to the stern. "Ahoy!" I shouted, trying to make myself heard above the wind. "Ahoy, there!"

He came around quickly, a box wrench he had been using held in one hand. There were smudges of grease and oil over the front of his shirt and on his hands and arms. He had one of those boyish handsome faces that women seem to find appealing, but his lips—

dark, almost purplish color from the cold—were skinned back with annoyance, spoiling the image. I wondered what he was trying to prove by not wearing a coat of some kind.

He said, "What the hell do you want?"

"Are you Andy Michaelis?"

"Who wants to know?"

I called out my name. "Can I come aboard?"

"What for?"

"I'd like to talk to you."

"I ain't got time to talk now."

"It'll only take a minute."

"I'm busy, friend."

"This is kind of important . . ."

"Some other time," he said.

"Breeze off, friend."

He was beginning to irritate me; I didn't like his impoliteness, or his insolent tone, or his manner. "Look, *friend*," I said, and there was an edge to my voice, "I'm trying to do a job. All I'm asking is a couple of minutes of your time. After that, you can get back to whatever you're doing and I'll be on my way. That will make us both happy."

His eyes narrowed. "Just who the hell are you?"

"I'm a private investigator," I told him. "I'm attempting to locate Mark Culhane, and I was told he worked for you as a deckhand for a while in September. Now—"

He got up onto his feet in a single motion, balancing himself on the rolling deck of the troller with his legs spread. Something dark and indefinable had passed across his face at my mention of Mark Culhane. His teeth were gritted together, and his free hand was balled into a white-knuckled fist at his side. "You got about thirty seconds to get the hell away from here," he said.

I tasted the sourness of rising anger in the back of my throat. "And then what happens?"

"You want to know that? Stick around."

I stood there, not moving. Our eyes were locked together. He had twenty years and about thirty pounds on me, but I doubted he had my knowledge of basic judo. I had an idea I would be able to take him, but I couldn't see any point of it.

In a controlled voice I said, "I'll be seeing you around again, Michaelis."

"Don't plan on it."

I turned my back on him and walked, slowly, along the float toward the ramp. I did not give him the satisfaction of looking back.

The boardinghouse where Mark Culhane had lived was a two-storied building on a road that

wound upward along the face of the hill overlooking Bodega Bay. There was a fine view of the harbor and Bodega Head and the Pacific Ocean beyond—or at least there would have been on a clear day. Now, the ebbing gray tendrils of fog allowed vision of little more than vague, surrealistic outlines, the way background is seen in a dream. The wind, oddly, was not as strong up here as it had been at the boat slips.

I parked my car in front and followed a crushed-shell path that led through a shimmering sea of vermilion and pink and lavender ice plants. As I neared the railed front porch, a girl about twenty or so came around from the rear of the house.

She was about five-eight, very slender, finely-boned, and she wore a pair of men's blue jeans and a heavy jacket with a fur collar. She had short flaxen hair, with a bright green scarf over it to keep it from tangling in the wind. Her cheeks were flushed from the cold, giving her a healthy, effulgent look. In her right hand she carried a pail.

She stopped when she saw me and set down the pail and stood waiting. She was smiling; it was a nice smile, friendly, contagious. "Hello, there," she said when I came up to her.

I smiled, too, genuinely. "Hi."

"If you're looking for a room, I'm afraid you're going to be disappointed. We haven't a single vacancy."

"No, I'm not looking for a room."

"Well, I hope you're not selling anything. My folks don't allow solicitors, you know." Her tone was apologetic.

I shook my head. "As a matter of fact, I came to see you. That is, if you're Sherry Davidian."

"Guilty," she said lightly. "But why on earth would you want to see me?"

I introduced myself. "I'd like to talk to you about Mark Culhane."

Her smile went away. Her mouth compressed into a hard, determined line, but her eyes held an open kind of sad and painful hurt. I believed the eyes. "I don't have anything to say about him," she said.

I felt uncomfortable. "Would you have any idea where he might be now?"

"No, and I don't care."

"He's missing, you know."

A frown corrugated her forehead. "Missing?"

"No one seems to have an inkling where he is."

"Why are you trying to find him?"

"I'm a detective, from San Fran-



cisco," I told her. "Mark's family hired me to find him. He hasn't been in touch with them for three months now."

"But I thought . . ." Her voice trailed off.

"You thought what, Sherry?"

She took a breath. "I thought that was where Mark had gone."

"Home, you mean?"

"Yes."

"Why did you think that?"

"I don't know," Sherry said. She averted her eyes for a moment. "No, that's not right. I thought he went home because of me."

"Why would he do that?"

Her eyes flashed defiantly, returning to mine. "Because I loved him! Because I wanted him to marry me!"

I looked out over the ice plants, shuffling my feet on the shell path. "Did Mark want to marry you, Sherry?" I asked gently.

"He said he did," she answered. "But he wanted to wait for a couple of years, until we were older. But it was all right with him if we—"

I cleared my throat and said quickly, "Did you argue about getting married? Have a fight?"

"We argued about it."

"Often?"

"A couple of times."

"When was the last time you saw Mark, Sherry?"

"The night before he—well, left."

"Wednesday night? October second?"

"Yes."

"Did you have an argument that night?"

"No. No, not really."

"Then why did you think he'd gone home because of the marriage question?"

"I—I just did, that's all. Why else would he have left so suddenly?"

"Tell me about that last time you saw him," I said. "Did Mark say anything to intimate he was planning to leave?"

"No."

"Would you mind telling me what you talked about?"

"The swimming party, mostly."

"Swimming party?"

"We were going over to Rio Nido, on the Russian River," Sherry said. "I know a bunch of kids there, and Mark and I were invited to this swimming party one of them was having. The weather was still pretty warm, then."

I nodded. "Anything else?"

"A lot of little things, I guess," she said. "We went for a ride up to Jenner and back, because it was a nice night, and we just talked the way you do when you're out driving."

I frowned slightly. "I was told Mark didn't have a car."

"We borrowed my parents'," Sherry said. "They liked Mark, and—" She broke off, her slim throat working.

I said, "Did you come back here after your drive?"

"Yes."

"What time was it when you arrived?"

"About ten-thirty or so."

"Did you go right in?"

"Well, I did, yes."

"Mark didn't?"

"No. He went to see Mr. Rigazzo."

I had been getting a cigarette out of my overcoat pocket. My hand froze around the pack. "What did you say?"

"Mark went to see Mr. Rigazzo," she repeated. "He lives up in Carmet-By-The-Sea. We had stopped by there on our way back from Jenner but he wasn't home, and Mark thought he might have been working after hours at the fish company. We were going to stop there first, before coming home, but it was getting pretty late and Mark said he didn't mind walking down there later on, because it was such a nice night."

I moistened my lips slowly. "Why did Mark want to see Rigazzo?"

"To ask him for Thursday off," Sherry said, "so he could go to the swimming party in Rio Nido with me. I had just found out

about it that night, you see, and I hadn't had the opportunity to tell Mark. He was sure Mr. Rigazzo wouldn't mind giving him the day off to go."

"And that was the last time you saw Mark, when he left to go down to the fish company?"

"Yes."

"One last thing, Sherry," I said. "Were Mark's belongings gone when you checked his room?"

"He didn't have much, really. Just a couple of changes of clothes and an old suit and some toilet articles."

"Then he didn't take them?"

"No," she answered. "That's another reason why I thought he went home. He told me once that he had a lot of things there, from when he was going to college."

I was silent for a moment, and then I said, "Okay, Sherry. You've been a great help and I appreciate it."

She put her hand on my arm. Her eyes were worried now. "You—don't think that . . ."

I knew what she was going to say. "Don't worry," I said in what I hoped was an encouraging tone. "Mark's all right. I'll turn him up before long."

"But you seem so grim now . . ."

I smiled and patted her shoulder. "I'll be in touch with you as soon as I learn anything."

"Would you do that, please?"

"Of course."

I turned to go. Sherry said softly, "Then, good-bye."

"Good-bye," I answered. "And don't worry." It sounded lame this time, and I thought I had best get out of there as quickly as possible.

When I reached my car I paused before getting in, to look back. Sherry Davidian was still standing where I had left her, a very small and very sad statue in the polychromatic splendor of the flowering ice plants.

The Rigazzo Fish Company was closed when I got down there a few minutes later; one of the pickups and the green car were gone. I parked and went around to the dock in the rear, but the corrugated doors were locked securely.

I went back to my car and drove up along Highway 29 for a couple of miles until I spotted a public telephone booth at one of those roadside stands that sold fresh crabs in season. It was boarded up now, for the winter.

I dialed the operator and asked for Bodega Bay information; there was no directory in the booth. They had a listing for a Guido Rigazzo in Carmet-By-The-Sea. I wrote down the number and his address in my notebook, and then thanked the operator and waited

for my dime to come back. When it did, I dialed Rigazzo's number and let it ring fifteen times, counting, but there was no answer. I hung up then, retrieved my dime, and returned to my car.

I sat there for a time. Now what? I wanted to talk to Rigazzo before I did anything else; I had a supposition—a hunch, if you will—that was nagging the back of my mind. But it was only that, and without anything substantial I would have been foolish to act on it.

There was another thing holding me back, too—the fervent hope that I was wrong.

I started the car and pulled out onto the highway again. Darkness was coming on now, with that quick deceptiveness you only seem to find during the winter, and I had to put on my headlights. The fog was thick and roiling still, but the velocity of the wind seemed to have lessened considerably; I wondered if it would rain after all. I looked at my watch and saw that it was almost five.

Even though I had not gotten an answer on the telephone, I decided I would drive up to Carmet anyway. I didn't have the vaguest idea where else to look for Rigazzo.

I reached Carmet-By-The-Sea—a spread-out, rather affluent community, comprised mostly of re-

tirement people—some twenty minutes later, but when I finally located Rigazzo's knotty pine, cabin-style home, I found it dark and deserted. The attached garage was open, and a car, this year's model, was inside. I rang the doorbell a couple of times and got no answer; Rigazzo, wherever he was, probably had one of the pickups I had seen at the fish company earlier.

I drove back to Bodega Bay. It was fully dark when I arrived, and I stopped at an all-night cafe a couple of miles north of The Tides and ordered something to eat. I had thought, while driving, that I was hungry, but when the food came I found I had difficulty getting any of it down. It wasn't the quality of the food, either. I left the cafe and went down to The Tides Motel and took a room.

Once inside, I lay down on the bed and chain-smoked cigarettes. Then I got up and began to pace the room. I was restless. I should have gone looking for Rigazzo, I should have started asking questions of people; somebody had to know where he was.

There was a free coffee dispenser in the room and I made myself a cup and drank it, and smoked more cigarettes. Then I lay back on the bed and closed my eyes and thought it all out again, care-

fully. I still came up with the same possibilities. If only I could . . .

I sat up. An idea had got into my head. I didn't have to talk to Rigazzo at all; if I was right I wouldn't get anything out of him anyway. There was another way, a simpler way, to prove or disprove my hunch.

I put my overcoat on and took my keys off the nightstand. I knew full well that if I dwelled on the implications, gave them attentive consideration, I would not go through with it—and I had to know.

I looked at my watch. It was ten-thirty. I went out to my car.

The Rigazzo Fish Company lay enshrouded in fog. The trailing gray wisps gave the building an almost ethereal quality in the darkness, and my footfalls on the gravel parking lot rang unnaturally loud in a stillness otherwise marred only by the bay water breaking against the wooden pilings below. I had left my car five hundred yards up the highway, and had made my way here slowly and with a surreptitiousness that was distinctly alien to me.

I reached the front of the building and stood in the shadows there. I was chilled. I was nervous. I had been a cop once; I had a healthy respect for the law. Breaking and entering is a felony, and

as such carried with it a stiff prison sentence. If I were caught . . .

Well, all right. I put that thought out of my mind and turned to the door and tested the knob. It was still locked, but then I had expected that. If I were going to get in at all, it would have to be at the rear.

I went along the front of the building, staying in the shadows, and stepped up onto the catwalk. I moved deliberately, watching my footing on the damp wood, mindful of the black water below. I came out onto the dock and stood with my back against the warehouse wall for a moment. I could make out the pier through the fog; there were two fishing boats tied up at the end of it now.

My heart had begun an irregular thumping in my chest. In spite of the cold, I could feel perspiration on my body; the palms of my hands were moist and sticky. I advanced to the corrugated doors, bending to examine the lock. I pushed gently at them, just above the lock; there was a faint rattling sound. I straightened. I couldn't get in through there without waking half of Bodega Bay in the process.

I walked to the opposite side of the building; no more doors, and no windows at all. I retraced my

path back to the corrugated doors and stood there and took a couple of deep breaths. It was no good. I was kidding myself; I had been all along. The thing for me to do was to get the hell out of here, go back to my motel room, and wait it out until morning. I could talk to Rigazzo then, see what I could get out of him, and then if—

The sound of the pickup truck turning off the highway, then onto the parking lot in front, was distinct and unmistakable.

I froze, listening. There was the squeal of worn brake lining as the pickup came to a halt. Two doors slammed, almost simultaneously.

I looked around, wildly, but there was no way I could get off this dock without being seen—unless I wanted to go over into the icy bay water, and I ruled that out immediately. I could hear the heavy tread of boots on the catwalk now. A few feet to my left were several stacks of crab pots similar to those I had seen at The Tides. I jumped there, my heart flailing violently and crouched down behind them. I held my breath.

The sound of voices carried to me almost immediately, drifting on the night wind. They were disembodied, unintelligible at first but as whoever it was drew nearer on the catwalk I could make out the words.

"... just don't like it, I tell you."

"So you don't like it. You heard the weather report. The storm won't break until morning."

"To hell with the weather report. It'll be plenty rough once we hit open water."

The two of them came into view, dark shadows at first, around the side of the building. They paused there. I couldn't see either of their faces, but I didn't need that to identify them; their voices were enough—Guido Rigazzo and Andy Michaelis.

Rigazzo said, "How's she running now? Okay?"

"I spent the whole damned day working on her, didn't I?"

"What's got you so jumpy tonight?"

"I don't think we ought to make the run, that's all."

"I told you what Bannister said on the phone. They're bringing in a hundred cases. What are they going to do with them if we don't pick them up?"

"I don't care what they do with them."

There was silence for a moment, and then Rigazzo said, "Listen, you're not worried about that private dick?"

"I don't like him snooping around here."

"He's not going to catch on to anything."

"That's what you say, Rigazzo."

"What can he find out?"

"What happened to the Culhane kid, that's what he can find out."

"Keep your mouth shut about that," Rigazzo said sharply. "The kid just took off. That's all anybody knows."

"Well, I still don't like it," Michaelis said.

"You're not starting to punk out on me, are you?"

"Is that what you think, Rigazzo?"

"... what it sounds like to ..."

They were moving along the pier now, and I couldn't understand any more, but I had heard enough. Crouching there behind the crab pots and listening, an insane impulse to go after them took hold of me, but I forced myself to remain still, watching the two of them move along the pier. I saw them, dimly, approach one of the boats tied up at the end there. They boarded her. It would be Michaelis' troller, the *Kingfisher*.

After a few moments, I heard the throb of the diesel. The *Kingfisher* edged away from the pier, out into the bay; it looked like one of those eerie, phantom ships you hear about in seafaring legends as it moved off through the fog. They were running without lights.

I came out from behind the crab pots and ran along the catwalk

and then through the gravel lot, up onto the highway. I had my keys in my hand before I reached my car. I slid in under the wheel, turned over the engine and took it out of there, tires wailing on the damp pavement.

I drove fast and hard, my eyes fastened on the white dividing line and my hands tight around the wheel. It took me ten minutes to reach the entrance to Doran Park, and another fifteen to wend my way along the narrow, sand dune-bordered road to where the Bodega Bay Coast Guard Station was situated.

I parked in front of the entrance and went inside and pushed my license photostat at the surprised seaman on office duty. I did a lot of fast talking, and that got me, finally, in to see the night commander—a young, sandy-haired, sleepy-eyed guy named Fitzpatrick.

I told him my story—what I had heard, what I had found out, what I suspected. He didn't look quite as sleepy anymore. He made me tell it another time, studying my identification while I did, interrupting periodically with questions. When he had apparently satisfied himself that I wasn't a crank of some kind, he told me to stay where I was and hurried out of there.

I paced his office, smoking, until

he came back a few minutes later. He sat on a corner of his desk and told me what was being done and that he had called the county sheriff's office to have a deputy sent over, and that there wasn't much for us to do now except wait.

We talked it out in detail again and then one of the men brought us some coffee. I smoked continuously until I ran out of cigarettes, and then I borrowed a pack from Fitzpatrick. I kept looking at the clock. Time crawled with a merciless slowness.

It was past one-thirty when the call came in.

I was there when Fitzpatrick took it in the radio room. One of the two patrol boats he had dispatched had picked up the *Kingfisher* only minutes before, about five miles up the coast. They had presumably been headed back for Bodega Bay.

The men from the patrol boat had boarded her there and had taken Rigazzo and Michaelis into custody. Michaelis had put up something of a fight, and they'd had to subdue him. The reporting officer didn't say what kind of fight, or how they had subdued him.

He did say this: in the troller's hold his men had found one hundred cases of bootleg Canadian

whiskey. I grinned complacently.

Fitzpatrick, a moon-faced guy named Cooper who was the deputy county sheriff, and I were waiting when they brought Rigazzo and Michaelis in. Michaelis had a strip of adhesive tape on his right cheek, and a lot of foul words for me on his lips. Rigazzo was sullen and silent, but his green-and-yellow eyes were sparking.

They were ushered into another part of the building, and Fitzpatrick and Cooper went there with them. I didn't ask to sit in on the questioning, and I wasn't invited. I waited in Fitzpatrick's office.

It was past four when Fitzpatrick returned. I was dozing in a chair; I had been too keyed up before to realize just how tired I was, but the apprehension of Rigazzo and Michaelis had released all of my pent-up tension and left me feeling drained.

It had taken them a while, Fitzpatrick said, but they had gotten a confession finally. They had concentrated on Michaelis—Rigazzo was uncommunicative and refused to say anything without his lawyer present—and under pressure, Michaelis had told them everything.

It was just about the way I had figured it, though of course I did not know the details until Fitzpatrick filled me in.

The way it was, Rigazzo and Michaelis had been part of a small-scale organization involved in the smuggling of "moon" whiskey from somewhere up in Canada. They would go out in Michaelis' troller at variable intervals—usually once a month—and meet some kind of vessel and make the cargo transfer at sea. Then they would bring the stuff back to Rigazzo's fish company, where it would be stored for a day or two—as short a time as possible to eliminate risk. Then it would be shipped out by truck to various distributors in the northern California area.

Michaelis had given Cooper and Fitzpatrick the name of their contact man—a Canadian named Bannister—and a pretty good idea of how the thing worked. Fitzpatrick had sent the other patrol cutter he had out to search for the other vessel, but they hadn't found it. Fitzpatrick didn't seem particularly worried about that. He had enough information now to break the back of the organization, and when that happened they would get them, too.

Everything had gone along smoothly for Rigazzo and Michaelis until the second of October. They had a run set up that night, and they were at the fish company when Mark Culhane came along to ask permission of Rigazzo for

the following day off to attend the swimming party with Sherry Davidian.

Mark had, apparently, overheard a portion of their conversation. He had panicked and tried to run, and Rigazzo and Michaelis had seen him. Rigazzo caught him and there was a scuffle, and Mark Culhane had been thrown to the concrete floor of the warehouse. He hadn't moved. When they checked him, they had found blood on the back of his head from where it had hit the concrete. He was dead.

Rigazzo had calmed Michaelis down—he had been badly shaken, he said—and they had talked it over. Rigazzo said that the only thing for them to do would be to get rid of the remains, and then play it as if Mark had simply run off. They took his body out

to sea that night and weighted it down and put it overboard.

The idea had worked well for them until I came along, digging. There were a lot of things, I found, that didn't coincide, and when I had put all of those things together I had come up with the possibility of the smuggling angle.

It was almost six when I left the Coast Guard Station. I did not want to see Steve Litchik and I did not want to see Sherry Davidian; and most of all, I did not want to drive back to San Francisco and see Mr. and Mrs. Timothy Culhane—but I would.

I would see them, all of them, and I would tell them what had happened to a nice young fellow named Mark Culhane who had been in the wrong place at the wrong time.

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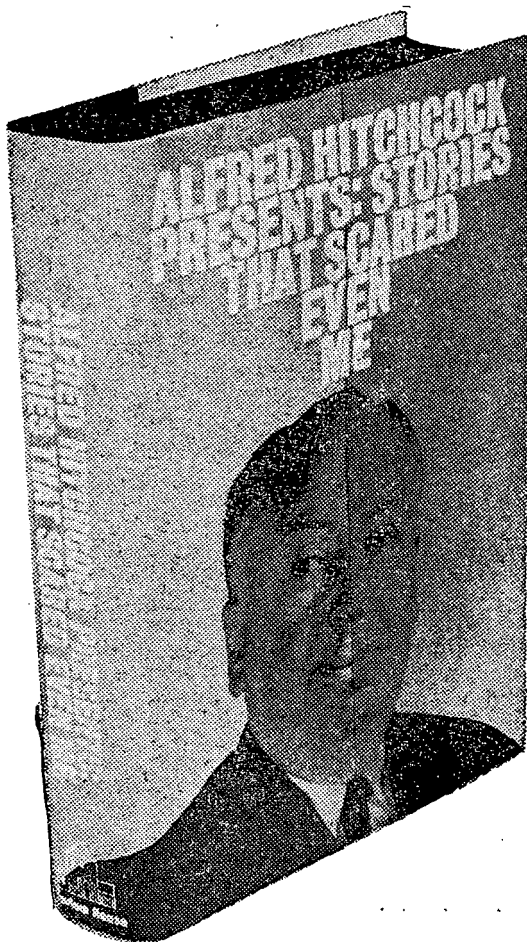
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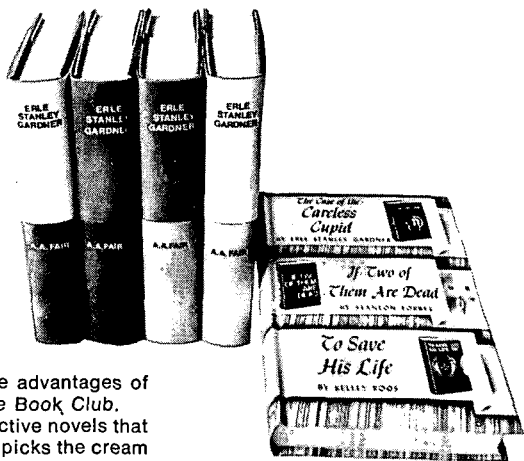
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